



# The Third Mission in Chilean Universities: An analysis from the perspective of its academics

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## Abstract

*The study analyses the participation of Chilean university academics in Third Mission (TM) activities. It focuses on their perceptions of the significance of these efforts for institutional development, their professional careers, and their social impact. The analysis of data from the Academic Profession in the Knowledge Society (APIKS) survey reveals that the faculty is predominantly involved in social, cultural, and educational activities. This reflects a tradition of social and cultural engagement in Chilean and Latin American universities. However, there is less involvement in industrial and entrepreneurial activities, such as patents, licensing, and business creation. Academics acknowledge the significance of TM activities in their teaching and research, which may suggest the integration of TM with the core functions of the university. Additionally, potential areas for future research are proposed, such as incorporating TM activities in performance evaluations and investigating obstacles to collaboration with industry.*

**Keywords:** *University; third mission; APIKS; Chile.*

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## 1. Introduction

Historically, university systems around the world have gained both their internal and external legitimacy based on their apparent separation or detachment from social issues at local and national levels (Pinheiro et al. 2015a). However, in recent decades there has been increasing pressure to broaden their focus beyond teaching and research and to adopt an ambiguous Third Mission (TM) of “contributing to society” (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020; Pinheiro et al. 2015b). In the European context, recent research points to a strong orientation of universities towards collaboration with industry and the productive sector to boost economic development (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020). This university-industry synergy has been explored through various conceptual frameworks, including the “entrepreneurial university”, the “triple helix model” (university-government-industry) and “mode 2 knowledge production” (Benneworth and Kitagawa, 2017). Within this framework, universities have adopted

organisational strategies focused on increasing their competitiveness, following the logic of “value for money” (Jessop, 2017).

In the case of Latin America, the third mission is still strongly linked to the Córdova Movement of 1918, which advocated a greater involvement of universities in improving living conditions and overcoming social inequalities. Over time, this vision of university extension has gradually been transformed into the idea of linking with the environment, with new demands for quality assurance under the growing influence of the evaluating state (Labraña et al. 2023). In Chile, recent studies have focused on the interaction between universities and the environment, the dedication of academics' time to TM tasks and their evaluation in the context of the academic career (Adán et al. 2016; Bernasconi et al. 2021), and the forms of organisation and management of the third mission in Chilean universities (Labraña et al. 2023). These studies show that interaction with the environment is multidirectional and requires integrated coordination of different areas and activities. It has also been observed that academics devote around 10% of their working day to activities related to the TM. However, there is a heterogeneous evaluation and development of this area compared to teaching and research, and in practice it is considered less important, without clear criteria and with lower institutional evaluation. Furthermore, it is noted that management of TM has changed, adopting principles of New Public Management, such as centralisation of decisions, creation of new administrative units, and implementation of monitoring and assessment systems for academic TM activities.

However, there is still a paucity of studies that explore types of TM activities and faculties' perception of their relevance to the core tasks of teaching and research, as well as their contribution to the different local, regional, national and international levels. This article therefore has two main objectives: firstly, to identify the most developed TM activities in Chilean universities; and secondly, to understand academics' perceptions of the importance of these activities for institutional development, their professional careers, and their contribution to the environment. It is divided into four sections: a conceptual framework to examine the results of the study; the methodology used, including the data collection mechanisms and their sources; the presentation of the main results; and, finally, the conclusions drawn from the study.

## **2. Conceptual framework**

The third mission (TM) of universities is seen as a broad and constantly evolving concept, influenced by interactions between universities, the state, industry and society at large. This view has been reinforced in recent debates, highlighting its complex and dynamic nature (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020; Giuri et al. 2019). According to Nedeva (2007), TM is defined more by the relationships it establishes than by the specific functions it performs, and is seen as an institutional commitment of universities to interact and establish different types of relationships with non-academic sectors. This relational approach suggests that TM does not

simply add new functions to the core of the university, but reconfigures the essential functions of teaching and research to enhance interactions with industry and society, promoting the integration of these activities into the core functions of the university.

Montesinos et al. (2008) divide TM into social, entrepreneurial and innovative dimensions. The social dimension emphasises the importance of universities in providing services that strengthen institutional image and community relations, beyond income generation. The entrepreneurial dimension focuses on the creation of economic resources through innovation and collaboration with industry and other sectors, which is crucial for local and regional development in a globalised environment. The innovative dimension relates to how universities use their research and development to create products and services that not only advance knowledge but also have practical applications in society.

Historically, universities have responded to external demands through TM, keeping it separate from their core activities of teaching and research. This separation has been strategic in order to protect the core activities of the university from the potential negative effects of openness to external influences (Pinheiro et al. 2015b). Nedevea (2007) identifies three factors or 'rules of engagement' that determine the interaction of universities with their environment: the nature of the sector (community or industry), the level of institutional recognition in the environment (external legitimacy and market status), and the nature of the exchange (short/long term, public/private, etc.). He also distinguishes two ideal university models according to their relationship with the environment: the private for-profit university, characterised by a high academic reputation and close links with global industry; and the service-providing university, financially dependent on the state and focused on the local community in economic, social and cultural terms.

On the other hand, Laredo (2007) classifies TM functions into three basic categories: accessible and broad education, professional training and specialised research, and academic training and basic research. According to Laredo, universities develop their linkages with the environment through combinations of these functions, depending on their institutional strategy. He also classifies linkage activities according to two approaches: social (including public contracts, policy formulation, social and cultural participation, and scientific dissemination) and economic (human resources, intellectual property, spin-offs, industrial contracts).

From a different perspective, Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno (2008) argue that TM is less about relationships and more about the pursuit of mutual benefits through partnerships, implying that TM and community engagement are inseparable from traditional teaching and research activities. In summary, TM can be conceptualised as a function, a relationship or a partnership, and a gradual but steady movement towards the integration of TM-related activities into the core functions of universities, such as teaching and research, is recognised, highlighting its growing importance in the strategic development of universities (Ramirez, 2010).

### **3. Method**

This study presents an analysis of empirical data obtained from the APIKS (Academic Profession in the Knowledge-Based Society) survey in the Chilean academic context. The collection was extended from the second semester of 2018 to the first semester of 2019, with an email invitation to more than 8,000 full-time academics (working at least 23 hours per week). Sixteen representative Chilean universities were selected, covering state institutions, private institutions that receive direct public funding, and private institutions that do not receive direct public funding. Of these, 11 agreed to participate. A total of 1,850 responses were received, of which 1,258 complete responses were used for analysis. According to Bernasconi et al. (2021), the results indicate differences in how Chilean academics divide their time between teaching and research. The main hypothesis is that different academic profiles may have different approaches to TM activities and their impact. In this study, respondents were grouped into three categories based on their commitment to research, teaching or a balance of both. Atypical responses due to excessive working hours were excluded, resulting in 1,121 valid surveys. Of these, 12% are more research-orientated, 21% are more teaching-orientated and 67% maintain a balance. The perceptions of these groups were analysed from three key perspectives. First, their involvement in TM activities with external partners (question E1). Second, their views on the importance of these activities for their research, teaching, reputation, academic career, and institutional mission (question E5). Third, their perceptions of the contribution of these activities to local, regional, national, and international industries and communities (question E6). Each aspect was assessed independently using descriptive statistical analysis.

### **4. Findings**

The results show that Chilean academics participate more frequently in social TM activities and, to a lesser extent, in activities related to the industrial and business sector. When asked whether they had participated in activities with “external” partners in the last three years, only 7% of academics with a primary research focus participated in activities related to patenting and licensing. This 7% remains the same for academics with a balanced commitment and is reduced to 1% for those whose main commitment is teaching. Regarding activities related to the creation of spin-offs/start-ups, only 1% of research-oriented academics report having participated in these activities. This percentage rises to 4% for academics with a balanced commitment, while it remains at 1% for those mainly involved in teaching. Similar patterns are observed for activities related to testing and prototyping: 4% of research-focused academics, 6% of balanced-focused academics and 7% of teaching-focused academics admit to having participated in these activities. On the other hand, 77% of academics with a research focus say they have participated in voluntary or advisory activities in social, cultural or educational institutions. These percentages are 73% and 74% respectively for academics with a balanced and mainly teaching focus.

In addition, 58% of academics with a primary research focus have participated in external councils or committees, a figure that remains the same for academics with a balanced focus and rises to 72% for those with a primary teaching focus. Similarly, 38% of research-orientated academics report having taken part in conferences and public lectures, a proportion that rises to 45% for those with a balanced focus and 61% for those with a teaching focus. In general, these results are in line with previous studies, which indicate that, in line with Chilean university tradition, social and cultural activities are more important than relations with the productive sector (Labraña et al. 2023). On the other hand, most academics in the different groups agree that TM activities are very important for institutional development and individual academic work. In fact, 71% of academics with a preference for research say that TM is important or very important for their research, while 83% of academics with a preference for teaching say that it is important or very important for their teaching. In the group of academics with a balanced workload, 55% consider TM activities to be important or very important for their research. At the same time, 68% consider these TM activities important or very important for their teaching. Similarly, 73% of academics with a preference for research work recognise that engagement with the environment is important or very important for their academic reputation. This perception is shared by 74% of academics with a balanced commitment and 71% of those with a primary commitment to teaching. Similarly, 62% of academics with a primary commitment to research recognise that TM activities are important or very important for the advancement of their careers. This perception rises to 71% and 74% respectively for academics with a balanced commitment and those with a predominant commitment to teaching. This perception contrasts with the opinion of senior managers in Chilean universities, who consider that the development of TM activities has fewer academic incentives than work related to publications in high-impact journals (Labraña et al. 2023). Moreover, 82% of academics with a preference for research work consider that TM is important or very important for the mission of their university, a perception that rises to 90% in the case of academics with a balanced commitment and 88% in the group of academics with a preference for teaching.

In this regard, we suggest that the aforementioned perceptions are influenced by the recent changes in the regulation of higher education in Chile, whereby Law 21.091/2018. This law establishes that the link with the external environment is an integral part of the institutional mission and, in addition, constitutes a mandatory area to be examined as part of the university quality accreditation process.

On the other hand, most of the academics interviewed consider that their TM activities contribute more to their local or regional community than to the national or international level. Indeed, 71% of those with a predominant commitment to research, 74% with a balanced commitment and 74% with a predominant commitment to teaching consider that their TM activities contribute quite a lot or a lot to their local or regional community. In contrast, only 20% of academics with a predominant commitment to research consider that their TM activities

contribute quite a lot or a great deal to industry. This finding is in line with previous studies showing that the amount of TM activities between universities and industry is lower compared to the intensity of interaction between universities and government and non-profit organisations (Bernasconi et al. 2021). At the same time, 72% of research-orientated academics say that their TM activities contribute quite a lot or a lot to society/community at national level. This perception drops slightly to 68% for academics with a balanced commitment and to 66% for academics with a preference for teaching.

Finally, 32% of academics with a primary commitment to research consider that their TM activities contribute quite a lot or a great deal to society at international level, a perception that reaches 34% in the case of academics with a balanced commitment and 26% in the group of academics with a primary commitment to teaching. This low level of perceptions contrasts with the recognised efforts of universities to integrate internationalisation into their institutional missions and to contribute to the international community through research collaboration, student and academic mobility and the improvement of educational quality through the internationalisation of their programmes (Ramírez-Valdivia and Latorre, 2022).

## **5. Conclusions**

This article examines the participation of academics from Chilean universities in TM activities. It focuses on their perceptions of the importance of these activities for institutional development, their own professional careers, and the contribution of these activities to the environment. The empirical findings contribute to the international academic debate on the development and implications of the TM of universities.

The results show that Chilean academics, regardless of their profile or commitment, are mainly involved in activities of a social, cultural and educational nature. This reflects a strong tendency towards social and cultural engagement, in line with the tradition of Chilean and Latin American universities. On the other hand, there is less participation in activities related to patenting, licensing and the creation of spin-offs or start-ups, which could indicate a weaker link with the industrial and business sector.

Similarly, academics consider TM activities relevant to the development of their teaching and research activities. At the same time, they recognise that these activities are important for their reputation and academic career. This finding suggests that TM activities are integrated with the core functions of Chilean universities related to teaching and research, in line with the current international trend (Pinheiro et al. 2015). However, results of previous studies (Adán et al. 2016) should be considered, which alert of the fact that these external activities carried out by academics are not necessarily evaluated in a standardised and systematic way, even though they are often taken into account for academic promotion purposes.

On the other hand, faculty perceive TM activities have a greater impact on local, regional, and national communities, and to a lesser extent at the international level. This pattern is consistent with the predominant type of universities in Chile, which, according to Laredo's (2007) classification, corresponds to a specialised university with a local focus. Research-intensive universities with a global orientation are a minority.

Finally, this study opens possibilities for future research that could explore how TM activities are included in the performance evaluation of university lecturers and their impact on the possibilities for promotion in the academic career. It would also be useful to investigate the reasons that limit the development of activities and stronger links with industry and the productive sector. These aspects are crucial for a better understanding of how Chilean universities can strengthen their role in society and the economy.

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