

The Contribution of (European) Universities to Research and Innovation

Johann Fellner*

Christian Doppler Laboratory for Anthropogenic Resources, Vienna University of Technology
Karlsplatz 13, 1040 Vienna, Austria

*Corresponding Author: johann.fellner@twien.ac.at

Abstract

The European Union has set itself the target to become the globally leading region in science and innovation until 2020. Thereto the national expenses for research and development should be increased to 3% of the Gross Domestic Product GDP, whereby a significant share should be invested into universities. So far only a few member states comply with this goal. In average only slightly above 2% of EU's GDP has been spent on research in 2013. In the frame of the presentation the status and role of universities in the European Union with regards to society's innovation is analyzed. Besides the input (public funding) into universities, the outputs in terms of graduates and knowledge generation are evaluated. The results of this analysis clearly indicate that countries spending more money on their universities do not only generate more outcome in terms of quantity (e.g., number of graduates or number of publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals), but also in term of quality (number of publications top cited or patents utilized by industry). Furthermore, it is shown that in the long run expenses on fundamental (basic) research pay off more when it comes to innovation (e.g. number of patents) in comparison to applied research. This finding is in clear contradiction to the research funding policy of many EU countries, including Austria. Thus, not only the amount of money spent on research determines the output of universities and the degree of innovation of a society, a country or a region like the European Union, but also where it is spent on. Therefore, a well balance between basic and applied research funds is recommended from the author's perspective.

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