

Special Session Proposal

Universities and Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Building Regional Synergies for Societal Impacts

In a world deeply marked by complex and interconnected changes and transformations, partnerships have been deemed a key element insofar as solutions cannot be addressed by only one actor. The idea of the State as a powerful and self-sufficient actor capable of solving all problems that afflict society belongs to the past, and new regional actors have emerged and, more importantly, must have voice in the development process of the regions in which they operate. Within this context, the establishment of partnerships can leverage substantial resources for a specific problem, conceive innovative approaches from the existing diversity of actors, tackle complexity, make changes in the regions, and provide a more enduring and creative solutions than any single actor could have provided alone. Universities, because of their tremendous potential, are crucial actors in the regional development process and are expected to deeply engage with other actors, going beyond their traditional missions of teaching and research. Although willing to be more cooperative, universities can still improve and greatly broaden collaborations with other regional actors, and therefore increase the impact on their regions and society as a whole. The specific demands and complex challenges faced in different contexts, both in developed and peripheral regions, are the driven forces to rethink and learn from different perspectives the role of universities in engaging with the communities where they are located.

The objectives of this Special Session are the following:

- To discuss the capacity building, in universities and regions, in order to understand the mechanisms and opportunities for fostering local cooperation;
- To understand the barriers and challenges in building these partnerships and how these may be overcome;
- To bring new learning, from developed and peripheral regions, to build understanding of 'what works' in mobilising universities for regional development;
- To discuss the understanding of what it means to be a 'civic' or socially responsible university in different regional context.

This Special Session aims at creating a space to dialogue, discuss and exchange good practices of HEIs and its embeddedness with regional development important themes. This session is addressed for all researchers, policy-makers, HEIs leaders, regional and local stakeholders, all those who have an interest in discussing the territorial contributions of HEIs in the context of the most recent societal challenges.