

14 Universities and Regions

New Insights and Emerging Developments

Laila Nordstrand Berg, Elisa Tomas, Tatiana Iakovleva, Rómulo Pinheiro, and Paul Benneworth

Abstract

In this concluding chapter, the editors take stock of the empirical findings across the cases and levels of analysis and link the empirical evidence to the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2. In so doing, we revisit the interplay between macro, meso, and micro dimensions of the environments as well as the temporality in which higher education institutions (HEIs) operate, which, taken together, help shape the mundane (everyday) or routine behaviours of actors within HEIs. The editors conclude by suggesting that the empirical evidence and conceptual insights advanced in this volume represent a needed first step, yet more needs to be done (future studies) to further unpack how the dynamic process associated with the everyday university–region interplay plays out in practice, and how it can be successfully managed and sustained over time.

Introduction

This book's starting point, as described in Chapter 1, is to consider the various processes by which university knowledge is made available and actionable by being taken up by and shaped in concert with regional actors. The primary focus of analysis is the micro-scale of individual agency (knowledge actor) and the ways in which university interactions with societal partners shape local contexts for actionable knowledge. As indicated at the onset and elaborated further in Chapter 2, the book's aim is not simply to map out the diversity among case institutions, engagement mechanisms, and regional contexts. The aim is also to use that diversity to advance a novel conceptual/analytical framework for unpacking the everyday engagements of university–regions, considering the dynamic, complex, and co-evolving interplay between (a) key social agents and institutions, (b) the contexts in which they are embedded, and (c) the historical trajectories and strategic ambitions underpinning context-specific social arrangements and interactions that are mediated by temporal and

spatial dimensions. In this concluding chapter, we take stock of the empirical findings across the cases and levels of analysis and link the empirical evidence to the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2.

The cases presented in this book provide a picture of how the interplay between macro, meso, and micro dimensions of the environments as well as the temporality in which HEIs operate help shape the mundane or routine (everyday) behaviours of actors within HEIs. As presented earlier, the *macro environment* refers to the extent to which the everyday engagements or interactions of university–regions are mediated by macro-level systems (broader context) – political, economic, social, cultural, and so on – at the regional, national, and global levels (e.g., national/regional science and innovation systems, government policy, world rankings). The *meso environment* refers to the sets of established (routine-like) and emerging daily practices and mechanisms – material, symbolic, informal, and so on – that characterize everyday life, including relationship networks and interpersonal relations. The *microenvironment* refers to the actions and behaviours of individuals and institutions at multiple levels aimed at either maintaining or changing the institutional (rules) and organizational (structures) settings underpinning their work.

The macro environment is exogenous because agents at the micro level often have limited power to change it. Social, cultural, and institutional arrangements determine how the “gatekeepers” of resources as well as the power holders impact agents and their behaviours (Brush et al., 2009). Meanwhile, the meso environment includes links between the macro forces and the micro level through intermediate institutions and structures. Meso institutions include occupational networks and business associations (Brush et al., 2009) that might have a significant impact on the behaviours of HEIs. Hence, the actions of key agents at the micro level have an impact, albeit indirectly, on the macro- and meso-level structures, not only the other way around. We illustrate below how the different dimensions comprising the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2 manifest empirically throughout the book and the individual case contributions later. Although we analyse these levels separately, the empirical materials provide support for important linkages across the levels and the time dimension, regarding past, present, and future scenarios, which is cutting through all levels. The discussion, by touching upon the correspondence between the macro, meso, and micro levels (plus the temporality), shows how policy and strategy (and other elements of the macro and meso levels) enable the agency of university actors (micro level).

Socio-cultural arrangements: the macro level

When analysing the different contributions of this book, there are differences in how the case HEIs are embedded in national and regional contexts and the types of opportunity structures that influence local developments (Edelman et al., 2016). We provide examples of how such opportunity structures allow for an interaction between agents and the institutional context. The historical scene, which includes but is not limited to the political embeddedness (Pfeffer &

Salancik, 2003), is clearly important to the way in which the case HEIs relate to their local and national surroundings. Starting with the Polish case (Chapter 11, Dąbrowska et al.), the HEI is embedded in a post-communist era, where universities still operate as ivory towers geared more towards academic values, and the focus on market conditions is lower than in other sectors. The universities are therefore isolated from societal needs, including their role in the local/national economy. The Polish case study reflects an attempt to develop the connection between the university sector and local government agencies to devise strategies and plans for regional economic development in the next decade. The tension between communist and market approaches is also a central feature of the Chinese case (Chapter 8, Liu). In this case, efficiency was hampered by the focus on hierarchy and control based on the communism approach, while the adoption of a market logic and service orientation was found to be far more efficient in both the establishment and operation of student incubators.

Another post-era that provides opportunities for influencing development is the chapter on the Caribbean (Chapter 13, Oftedal et al.). The case university is not only a multicampus HEI but also a multinational one, consisting of universities in the 17 small-island nations composing the Caribbean region. The islands are still rebuilding from the colonization and slavery period in addition to struggling with the local effects of climate change, financial crisis, and more recently COVID-19. The university is a central actor in the effort to rebuild the region and is not only required to manage the various political and economic conditions from different governments; central actors in the university are also working as political activists to promote new ideas and initiatives geared towards socio-economic development. The evidence from the case suggests that the university's structure, strategy, and core activities reflect a mixture of embeddedness in *political* (across nations), *cultural* (across islands), *social* (across networks), and *cognitive* (expressed in, for example, political activism) elements (Kloosterman et al., 1999; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003).

In a society with a low degree of trust in government, the role of local universities can be crucial for the development of a region (Gunasekara, 2006), as described in the case from Brazil (Chapter 4, Faccin et al.). When a region that had been well developed experienced economic stagnation and decline, combined with low levels of trust in central authorities, joint collaborations between universities and private and public actors were established, boosting the regional economy. This can be seen as a bottom-up approach to political embeddedness as a means to improve living conditions in the region as well as a social embeddedness approach (Granovetter, 2005) involving the proactive efforts of a network of local actors or a regional coalition (Pinheiro & Normann, 2017; Thomas & Asheim, 2022).

In peripheral or less-developed (“thin”) regions (for recent accounts, see Benneworth, 2018; Pinheiro et al., 2018), HEIs can contribute to the development of the local economy by providing education and research that supports regional needs and participating in third-mission activities and innovative projects. The local actors are building and engaging in networks that influence social embeddedness (Granovetter, 2005). The example from Italy (Chapter 5,

Tomasi et al.) is illustrative of how the development of knowledge networks brings together local actors from different parts of the economy; for example, students and university actors come together to develop projects to boost the economy and contribute to a more sustainable society. This peripheral dimension is also central in two of the chapters from Norway (Chapter 3, Berg & Yttri, and Chapter 12, Berg & Hope). Still, the focus here is less on third-mission activities and more on educational efforts to provide the peripheral region with professionals and keep students from moving away after graduating, thereby influencing social embeddedness (Granovetter, 2005).

The other Norwegian cases in the book were found to be responsive to the opportunity structure resulting from political embeddedness (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003) through reforms and a governmental push to increase focus on third-mission activities, co-creation, and entrepreneurship. Examples of this are given by Karlsen and Pinheiro (Chapter 10), Berge et al. (Chapter 7), and Iakovleva and Adkins (Chapter 6). The chapter from Abualruband and Pinheiro (Chapter 9) problematizes this push from central government to be both exceptional in teaching and research and relevant in relation to universities' local and global aspirations.

Hence, a pattern seems to emerge from our empirical material: in countries with low governmental influence over universities, the role of the university as an active agent in regional and national development is rather prominent, not only in terms of providing teaching and research but also the high focus on the third mission of regional engagement. However, this picture is blurrier in the cases of Norway and China, where local initiatives towards third-mission activities can be categorized as strategic responses by the actors involved to governmental policies and incentive structures. That being said, in the case of Norway (but not exclusively), such strategic efforts at the macro (policy) and meso (university strategy) levels are mediated by existing structural and cultural barriers at the level of the academic profession and/or a given knowledge domain. Existing professional incentive structures are still geared towards the core activities of teaching and research, particularly the latter, rather than local engagement per se, as found in earlier studies (Balbachevsky, 2008; Pinheiro, 2012; Benneworth et al., 2017).

In Table 14.1, the chapters are organized according to the government's influence on the mundaneness of HEIs' activities (high versus low) as well as

Table 14.1 Mapping the volume's empirical contributions

		<i>HEIs' locus of attention</i>	
		<i>Internal orientation</i>	<i>External orientation</i>
Government influence	High	Norway Chapters 7, 11	Norway Chapters 4, 5, 8, 10 China Chapter 9
	Low	Poland Chapter 3	Brazil Chapter 6 Italy Chapter 12 The Caribbean Chapter 13

Source: Authors' own

the orientation of HEIs' activities (internal versus external with regional stakeholders) or locus of attention.

Mundaneness: the meso level

As indicated at the onset, mundaneness, as applied to the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2, manifests in three distinct levels: institutionalization processes, materiality and practice, and leadership. We tackle each of these aspects below as empirically demonstrated in the case stories.

Institutionalization of mundaneness

Scott's three institutional pillars (Scott, 2008) reflect three different logics and ways of considering how work becomes mundane. The *regulative* pillar refers to regulations and legal frameworks that exist at a societal level, independent of the particular organizations. Such regulation must be interpreted and implemented by the members of the organization to become a part of the mundane work. Within institutions, templates for actions are developed as well as regulative mechanisms to enforce them. This is an influence that goes both ways, as actions also influence the institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009). Different logics can motivate application of the alternative ways of acting (e.g., an instrumental logic is prominent in relation to regulations). The members of an organization act in an instrumental way to avoid losing legitimacy and even to avoid punishment. The *normative* pillar reflects precisely this: the norms and values that are dominating and influencing behaviour in daily life. Such values can originate, for example, in professional norms or academic fields and consist of (informal) instructions regarding how to behave and perform within the organization. Here the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 2011) is prominent: What is appropriate to do in this situation? Such norms become institutionalized and are not necessarily reflected on a daily basis. The last pillar, the *cultural cognitive* pillar, is based on how the members cognitively perceive the cultural surroundings and how this is interpreted and integrated in the organization in a way that it is taken for granted (Scott, 2008). Culture becomes a part of the identity of the members and is influenced by traditions and common perceptions of how to act and how to perceive the social reality where the organization operates. The logic of orthodoxy – “this is how we have always done this” – regulates the mundane activities from this perspective.

In relation to the daily activities and mundane life that unfolds between HEIs and regional actors, we apply the three institutional pillars (Scott, 2008). The relevance of an institutional framework is addressed by Iakovleva and Adkins (Chapter 6) in their chapter on different types of entrepreneurship and university – industry collaboration. They point to the fact that activities within the university are affected by the regulative framework. Projects and collaborative initiatives that receive incentives from the university are more easily institutionalized (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott,

2008) and become an integral part of the mundane activities within the university. Examples of this are joint research projects between the university and industry. New initiatives, such as start-ups, licensing, and patenting, have not become institutionalized to the same degree and could benefit from an increase in incentives to boost university–research collaboration.

Similar findings are described in the Polish case (Chapter 11, Dąbrowska et al.). The Polish university sector seems decoupled from the needs of society and the development of surrounding regions, and the level of cooperation with local authorities is weak. This can be linked to few incentives for academics to pursue such activities as a regulative tool but also seen in the light of the cultural pillars and logic of orthodoxy (Scott, 2008), where such non-scientific activities are regarded to have less value than “pure science”. Individual scientists who are cooperating with local governments can help to build trust between academia and surroundings, and in turn such activities can facilitate cooperation at an institutional level, which, in the long run, can contribute to changing the system.

Another chapter that illustrates how demanding it is to introduce new elements into a highly institutionalized organization, as a university, is Chapter 10 (Karlsen and Pinheiro). The authors study the efforts to develop a new university strategy and the establishment of a co-creation lab where academics, students, and regional actors from the public and private sectors can co-create solutions and entrepreneurial activities for the region. The process to establish this lab was characterized by a clash of logics on the part of the different actors involved. This chapter illustrates that, even if the regulative framework is provided by central actors at the university – in this case a new vision statement – the various implementers follow different institutional logics (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). This, in turn, affects university norms and culture, resulting in clashes and tensions, thus making cultural change a daunting task, even in the context of a relatively young university. The professional norms underpinning academic tasks and roles diverge from those emanating from managerial and politico-administrative-based models at the level of the central administration and leadership, and this clash can contribute to the growing divide between the leadership and academics within the university on the one hand and internal and external stakeholders on the other (for an earlier discussion, see Berg & Pinheiro, 2016).

Another aspect is that it takes time to institutionalize (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) new initiatives. As Abualrub and Pinheiro (Chapter 9) point out, (Norwegian) academics are exposed to simultaneous demands to deliver relevant and high-quality teaching to the region while striving for research excellence and global competition. This results in a divided focus for the academics, who may struggle to meet the increasing demands from multiple actors. If the academics are constantly exposed to new inputs regarding how to improve teaching and research, new routines are not routinized, and they fail to become a part of what is taken for granted and mundane. When institutionalized in this way, one does not spend much time reflecting on how things should be done, and that frees more time for other activities. The institutionalization of activities

that seem to have a similar focus – as in the case of student entrepreneurship (Chapter 7, Berge et al.) – can take very different forms. By comparing cases from three different universities in a Norwegian region, student entrepreneurship activities were found to reflect characteristic features of the universities (one with a regional focus, one with a national focus, and the last with a global focus), and this focus seems to be institutionalized into what the students were doing through their internships.

Taking mundane activities for granted in the context of a changing political and economic environment can also contribute to decline and closure of the educational institution, as illustrated in the case of teacher education in Western Norway (Berg & Yttri, Chapter 3). Even though local actors were successful in building a solid teaching programme that was seen as benefiting the region and became an institutionalized part of the university's culture, new government-mandated reforms emphasizing research and a more global competitive focus challenged the logic of orthodoxy, resulting in the need to merge with other HEIs to survive as an educational organization.

Materiality and practice

Mundane activities are often made visible through materiality (Buse et al., 2018), and mundane work is often influenced by material practices related to “things” such as our technical environment, computers, and programmes. The aspect of practice includes a relationship between actors' competencies, ongoing dynamics and processes, the relation to the material side and embodied, tacit knowledge, and routine activities (Buse et al., 2018). “Know-how” and “craft knowledge” enable or hinder daily activities. In light of such mundane activities, examples of how the interaction involving local actors can contribute to regional development can be found in several of the chapters in this book. This is particularly the case for students' involvement with engagement or third-mission activities that are tightly coupled with teaching. In the chapter by Berg and Hope (Chapter 12), the authors focus on history students interning at a museum. The students were learning the craft and developing know-how on the museum sector by performing mundane activities. In the chapter from Italy (Chapter 5, Tomasi et al.), the university applies experiential learning, where students work together with local actors and in that way receive different types of knowledge in relation to food, wine, agriculture, and tourism. Such material actions can foster innovation and rural development, and they also contribute to the students' employability. This was explicitly expressed by actors in the Norwegian case (Chapter 12, Berg & Hope); after the internships, the students reported having learned “material practices” that could be used for holiday jobs and even permanent job positions.

Mundane activities are interconnected with spatiality, temporality, and practice (Buse et al., 2018). The way agents design and physically organize their social and physical work influences their mundane activities. The locations can vary from physical organizational buildings to informal spaces in and between

organizational boundaries. Departments that are located close to each other often influence the development of social networks and trusted organizations, as they are easier to access than those located in more remote settings.

The most prominent example of spatiality in our book is the university in the Caribbean (Chapter 13, Oftedal et al.). This university is situated not only in different locations but also across many different island nations, thus being exposed to multiple regulative environments. The spatiality element can be seen as an advantage regarding the mission of universities to provide education to the population in the scattered region and develop third-mission activities. The Caribbean university has built a clear structure to support this and shared responsibilities for different areas among different campuses. This can also be challenging due to large physical distances and internal competition regarding what needs to be in focus, but the university can also assume a bold role by giving advice on development regarding difficult issues across the different countries. Spatiality and geography can also be seen as an advantage in regional development, as actors from different locations can provide networks across a larger area. For example, the three universities in the Brazilian case (Chapter 4, Faccin et al.) or the two campuses at Norway's UiA (Chapter 10), through emerging practices, link up to different actors in the region, including public agents, civil society, and private companies. The universities can have legitimacy and act as a catalyst in regions where trust in national and local authorities is low. By establishing such networks, underpinned by trusting collaborations among local actors, both formal and informal contacts can become part of mundane activities that have the potential to boost the regional economy. In other areas, bottom-up network arrangements in the form of regional coalitions (Pinheiro & Normann, 2017) may be efficient means to reach regional development goals in the absence of stable, efficient, and trustworthy governmental agencies.

The mundaneness of leadership

Hierarchies and power relations also regulate practice and influence the mundane (Buse et al., 2018). Turning our gaze towards the managerial side of the organization, the differences in what leaders do compared to what employees do are not remarkable (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Mundane activities are mostly neglected in the literature on management and leadership studies. Nevertheless, performing administrative tasks, chatting with employees, listening to them, gossiping, and creating a good working atmosphere are considered as important mundane activities of leaders, and the significance of leadership may be more linked to such activities than broad strategies and changes (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Such mundane activities, it is argued, are given extraordinary meaning as they are performed by managers.

Our studies do not cover mundane activities such as the small talk to employees (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003), but the cases from China (Chapter 8, Liu) and Norway (Chapter 10, Karlsen & Pinheiro) illustrate how micromanagement as a mundane activity hinders development, not least going against professional norms centered on academic freedom and autonomy. Finally, the case

of Brazil (Chapter 4, Faccin et al.) illustrates the importance of leadership and local coalition building in processes of regional engagement aimed at fostering socio-economic impact.

Agency: the micro level

The book emphasizes the analysis of the roles played by universities' different agents in engaging with their surrounding regions. Although universities, as organizations, are expected to contribute to regional growth, in practice the engagement with external actors is undertaken by individual academics or research groups. The authors of the book chapters discuss how different university agents perform their ordinary activities engaged with "regional agents" because universities' engagement is context-specific and contingent on agency. We view agentic behaviour as a structuration process, including iterative, projective, and practical-evaluative behaviours (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). While iterative behaviour reflects routinized patterns in an organizational context, projective behaviour generates possible future trajectories of action that are creatively reconfigured on the basis of the actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future. Finally, practical-evaluative behaviour reflects the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments regarding alternative trajectories of action in response to emerging demands and dilemmas alongside the ambiguities of evolving situations. In this way, agents both are affected by and help shape the structural conditions through their actions and experiences (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009).

It is the agent who mindfully deviates from existing paths to establish new practices that will, over time, create new routines (Garud & Karnøe, 2003; Steen, 2016). In this book, some of the chapters investigate how new paths emerge instead of others and how this process is influenced by actors' habitual activities. As pointed out by Steen (2016), actors respond to changes and influence the contexts in which they operate. Yet, at the same time, as outlined by institutional scholars regarding the dilemmas of embedded agency (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009), local actors are often socially conditioned to accept their institutional and organizational contexts as natural or given, thus restricting their room to manoeuvre when attempting to change such conditions.

There is a considerable variety of practices analysed in the book that form the mundaneness of universities' regional engagement. For example, Iakovleva and Adkins (Chapter 6) explore how academics contribute to knowledge transfers to the region. Through iterative behaviours, such as joint research projects, academics are able to reinforce already established routines. At the same time, some academics demonstrate projective behaviours and engage in entrepreneurial activities, which are less rooted in traditional teaching and research associated with academic jobs. Another example of projective behaviours can be found in Chapter 11, (Dąbrowska et al.), which describes the behaviour of representatives of the university who actively participated with residents and other stakeholders to design the Warsaw Development Strategy 2030. Chapter 12 (Berg & Hope) describes practical-evaluative behaviours of programme coordinators who initiated

partnerships with regional actors to institutionalize internship programmes. The actions of these university agents fit well within the concept of “entrepreneurial agency” (Garud & Karnøe, 2003), which is explained by the complementarity of knowledge and practices from universities and external partners: each actor possesses incomplete knowledge, and thus all must collaborate to harness specific and complementary knowledge with the goal of delivering value to the region.

Agents within HEIs include students as well as academics. Faccin et al. (Chapter 4) tell a story that includes students as representatives of the university in key activities, such as network mobilization and project management, working together with external stakeholders to transform the region into an ecosystem conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation. Whether students originate from the same region in which the university is located or they stay in the region after graduation, they contribute to regional path creation. This is an example of practical-evaluative behaviours. Creating a new path is the result of collective rather than individual agency, and the actors are embedded in these paths at the same time as they shape them, fostering structural change (Garud & Karnøe, 2003; Steen, 2016).

University agents may act as change agents when they enable structural change both within the university and across the regional economies, acting as “academic entrepreneurs” (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008). Some case studies, such as the ones reported by Tomasi et al. (Chapter 5) and Oftedal et al. (Chapter 13), show that the regional role of the university is dependent on people, and therefore the potential for regional change is dependent on individual actors as well. This is understandable, given that local agents have ties with social and economic networks in their home regions, which allows them to understand and draw from the region’s capabilities to develop engagement activities contributing to regional development (Pinheiro et al., 2017; Neffke et al., 2018).

University agents are responsible for engagement activities, but often these activities are not transformed into daily routines. If engagement activities are not embedded into the university’s habitual actions, including a tight coupling with core teaching and research tasks, the potential positive effects for both the region and the university are very fragile in the long run (cf. Pinheiro et al., 2015). The empirical insights emanating from many of the chapters in the book offer important lessons about how universities could better institutionalize their regional engagement. Attention should be paid to the degree of coupling between core and third-mission activities. Critical local agents, and the informal social networks (both local and global) in which they are deeply embedded, need to be both recognized and rewarded accordingly if such efforts are to become sustainable (institutionalized) in the long run across the institutional fabric (formal and informal or cultural structures) of universities.

Temporality

Temporality, in this book, is seen as a meta-dimension that embraces the interlink among the three levels forming universities’ regional engagement: the

macro level of sociocultural arrangements, the meso level of mundaneness, and the micro level of agency. In this book, we have investigated the importance attributed to temporal dimensions (Buse et al., 2018) – *past* events, *present* conditions, and *future* scenarios with strategic aspirations – as well as the complex and dynamic interplay between them.

Past events, internal and external to universities, such as mergers or failed mergers and public reforms, create pressure for new ways for universities to connect with regional actors. For example, the case discussed by Karlsen and Pinheiro (Chapter 10) shows that the university established a new strategic vision as a response to governmental reforms in Norway and changing national and global institutional and operational environments. The same applies to another Norwegian case study (Chapter 3, Berg & Yttri), in which the university adapted its teachers' education programs following external decisions that led to three university colleges merging into one university. External pressures, especially top-down decisions from governmental agencies, are clearly seen as reasons over time that drove universities closer to their regions or at least that changed the way universities engaged with regional actors in Norway.

This was also seen in the Chinese case (Chapter 8, Liu). China has had a long history of institutionalization of a bureaucratic way of working, and it takes time to change such path dependency (cf. Krücken, 2003). This is evident in the establishment of university incubators in two provinces, where one continued the historically established path while the other took a new route and developed a more market-oriented approach. The market-oriented case has flourished compared to the more bureaucratic case, which struggles to implement successful student entrepreneurship. If actors in the Chinese incubator context manage to institutionalize the new approach, it could potentially influence the development of incubators throughout the entire country in the future. However, the clash of institutional logics (cf. Greenwood et al., 2010) between the deeply institutionalized tradition of strong (top-down) state control and the need for more decentralized market- and network-based arrangements and mechanisms may make this a daunting task for both universities and regional actors. Norway, and the Nordic countries more generally, may serve as an important benchmark in this respect, as they are able to combine strong state-centred regulative frameworks with high levels of university autonomy and other policy instruments that are conducive to the adoption of more informal (networks) and dynamic market-based arrangements at the local level (see Sørensen et al., 2019).

It is different, however, when one analyses universities in countries where the government does not exert such a strong role, as in the cases of Brazil, the Caribbean, and Italy. Chapter 4 (Faccin et al.) reports a case study in Brazil, where the universities decided to lead a movement together with other actors to revitalize the regional ecosystem and develop an environment in which entrepreneurship and innovation could flourish. The present socio-economic context of the region and past experience influenced the leaders' intentionality and efforts (Lawrence et al., 2009). The history of the region justified the

actions, while the past relationships of universities with several stakeholders gave the universities the necessary legitimacy to take a leadership position. Future expectations about regional ecosystem renewal influenced the actors' intentionality, explaining their goal-oriented actions (Buse et al., 2018).

In the Caribbean islands, Chapter 13 (Ofstedal et al.) investigates the case of the University of the West Indies, which illustrates the importance of temporality. Due to past practices over decades in the region, the university identifies itself as an "activist university", where senior leadership propels the university's societal mission. Additionally, the example from Italy (Chapter 5, Tomasi et al.) shows the history of the relationship of the university with regional actors, where the initiative from the university and internal agents led to the creation of knowledge networks. Throughout the book, it is rather clear how *time*, as a meta-dimension, unifies several elements that form the mundane embeddedness of universities in the region.

The following findings from our case studies are not set in stone, but they indicate that changes born from universities' internal initiatives take longer to materialize into institutionalized change when compared to pressure exerted in a top-down manner. However, by analysing the cases of these three countries (Brazil, the Caribbean, and Italy) one can clearly see that the main driver is individuals at the university, stressing the role of agency as a critical component in institutionalizing new ways of regional engagement, as illustrated in previous studies (Benneworth et al., 2017). People take their time to create and establish strong ties with regional partners, with the good of their region in mind. This highlights the overarching reach of temporality over the macro level of embeddedness, the meso level of mundaneness, and the micro level of agency.

Some chapters have explored the evolution of their case studies over time, such as the examples of Berge et al. (Chapter 7) and Dąbrowska et al. (Chapter 11). The temporally embedded process of social engagement relies on habits from the past to imagine the future, while contingencies of the present contextualize how this transformation will occur (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The present challenges the past in one of the case studies presented by Abualrub and Pinheiro (Chapter 9). The university has a long history of meeting regional needs through vocationally oriented educations, but this is being challenged by external pressure from multiple stakeholders to also focus on global competition, excellence, and future relevance. Actors within the university struggle to balance excellence in teaching (connected to a historical commitment to this task) with fostering research quality while competing with larger national and global players. The case presented by Iakovleva and Adkins (Chapter 6) shows a relatively new university struggling with past arrangements. It takes time to establish new routines and support structures to develop into an entrepreneurial university with a greater focus on innovation, and current (and future) development is hampered by an absence of a holistic approach.

We can clearly see that the future scenarios of the case studies are shaped by path dependence, which considers not only past relationships of universities and regional actors but also universities' profiles, internal dynamics, and

organizational cultures (for a discussion, see Krücken, 2003). Nevertheless, as universities are also active in leading regional change, future aspirations are being developed and may become routinely embedded into universities' third mission in the future. In Norway (Chapter 7, Berge et al.), for example, three universities decided to join forces and create a common platform for promoting student entrepreneurship education and activities in the region. In that case, the sense of security supported by tacit rhythms and rituals (Buse et al., 2018) is being shaken by intentionality as a part of universities' institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Another example of a university's effort to change its traditions and increase its future regional impact is presented in Chapter 12 (Berg & Hope), showing how actors adjust their actions and evaluate current possibilities (Araujo & Harrison, 2002) to improve student internship. With the aim of keeping students in the region in the future, the university gained experience from previous established networks (e.g., from the business administration bachelor) to establish new programmes such as sociology and history. As affirmed by Araujo and Harrison (2002), path dependence differs from determinism when agents are aware of their ability to change the course of events. A university's agents may create new paths, and the efficacy of their choices is temporally dependent.

In short, the diversity of accounts associated with the case studies presented in this book attests to the complexity of university-region interactions, lending support to the analytical framework advanced at the onset of the volume in Chapter 2 (Pinheiro et al.). Moving forward, future studies could deepen our understanding of the complex ways in which macro, meso, and micro dimensions interact to produce dynamic and non-linear outcomes (at both the level of the universities and that of the regions) that can be neither predicted nor steered or regulated by any single entity or individual. The ability of regions and universities to adapt to emerging circumstances, including structural shocks and crisis, is a function of the ways in which local knowledge ecosystems, both formal and informal, emerge and are nurtured over time in the context of existing and new or emerging institutional arrangements. This occurs alongside the intentional actions of key local agents, more often than not working together in the form of regional coalitions (Pinheiro & Normann, 2017) that, in an increasingly digitally mediated world, cut across traditional conceptions of time, space, and social relations.

Concluding thoughts

We started this volume by pointing to the wicked issue of university engagement in regional development. So far, there has been a focus on “happy family stories” of ambitious regional development coalitions that have had visible impacts in the form of successful spin-offs or clusters of industrial actors attached to such universities. Through this volume, we emphasized that it is equally important to shed light on the “everyday” engagements of universities through the lens of mundaneness, where actors such as academics and students contribute to the development of the regions in which they are located

through their daily actions and practices. There are many ways in which university knowledge agents can build connections with regional partners, and this book provides various examples of such mundane activities in different countries.

The evidence presented in this volume across different countries and contexts suggests that mundaneness matters. However, we need to convert it from a normative concept into a practical approach whose benefits are clear and which encourages relevant policies to facilitate HEI-regional engagement. In particular, the idea of agent behaviours and temporality, which enable structural changes in the organizational context, might be of interest. It is always individuals who are behind the changes, and the inclusion of multiple stakeholder views and insights (democratic deliberation and/or co-creation) is important. At the same time, it is not always clear what events or actions in particular result in positive or negative changes. In other words, it is much harder to measure the effects of mundaneness in comparison to traditional “hard” measures like the number of patents and/or licences.

Therefore, in order to enable the positive effects of mundaneness on HEI-region interactions, there is a need for a framework and guidelines around how to build such effects. We have been working in this book with four key dimensions: macro, meso, and micro environments, and temporality. This not only has aided our analysis but could also offer a template for understanding mundaneness. We propose (and explore in Chapter 2) a model of mundaneness that might be helpful for further unpacking this complex process.

Making interactions between HEIs and regional actors happen is about managing the contestable nature of behaviours – the trajectory is always a product of social shaping forces. For any change in actors’ behaviour and for the establishment of new routines, there should be scope for moving the walls of an established trajectory. Nevertheless, in practice, there are multiple obstacles – some of which are more susceptible than others to policy intervention, whether at a state or organizational level.

One area where there is considerable scope for fostering successful HEI-region interactions is in designing a supportive regulative environment. This could include proper incentive systems, which can stimulate such cooperative activities, and encourage the development of cognitive skills to support joint research projects and cooperative activities with various regional stakeholders to facilitate positive social outcomes. It takes time to build and foster norms of behaviour, but once this is done, the supportive collaborative culture can reinforce itself, creating mundaneness processes. Policies might include training and empowering university staff to take initiatives to interact with regional actors through a spectrum of activities and social arrangements. There might be considerable scope for using rewards to help set and shape the direction of such activities, privileging interactions that demonstrate a high degree of social impact. Finally, regarding social capital as a critical factor, it is important to note that regional and national initiatives can include the development of organizational networks that include HEIs, industry, government agencies as

well as civic society groups, which aim to make HEI-region interactions less time- and resource-demanding for each individual actor.

With regard to future research directions in the field, while we are confident that this volume offers a valuable contribution to the ongoing debates and literature on the role of HEIs in regional development, there are some points that have been raised but not explored in-depth in the book. These might well constitute a valuable future research agenda in this important field. As demonstrated by some of the cases included in this volume, everyday routines in HEIs revolve around teaching and research activities, including fund-raising, quality assurance, and challenges imposed by the changes in global development, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. It should be acknowledged that interaction with regional actors and knowledge transfer is not a separate and isolated activity; rather it should be seen, as illustrated in many cases in this volume, as an integrative part of everyday HEI tasks and routines. We have stressed the importance of individuals and mundaneness processes to the role of HEIs in regional development, but more needs to be done to further unpack how the process of mundaneness can be successfully managed and sustained over time. This includes, *inter alia*, addressing the following queries, preferably using comparative and longitudinal research designs based on mixed methodologies: Who are the internal and external agents who might participate and orchestrate those processes? What outcomes can be expected, and how can these outcomes be assessed and quantified? Who benefits from engagement, under what circumstances and why? What types of new tensions and dilemmas emerge, and how do they affect teaching and learning as well as knowledge production, diffusion, and co-creation? We hope that researchers in the field will examine these and other related aspects.

References

- Alvesson, M., & Sveningsson, S. (2003). Managers doing leadership: The extra-ordinarization of the mundane. *Human Relations*, 56(12), 1435–1459.
- Araujo, L., & Harrison, D. (2002). Path dependence, agency and technological evolution. *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, 14(1), 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09537320220125856>
- Balachevsky, E. (2008). Incentives and obstacles to academic entrepreneurship. In S. Schwartzman (Ed.), *University and development in Latin America: Successful experiences of research centres* (pp. 23–42). Rotterdam: Sense.
- Battilana, J., & D’Aunno, T. (2009). Institutional work and the paradox of embedded agency. In T. Lawrence, R. Suddaby, & B. Leca (Eds.), *Institutional work: Actors and agency in institutional studies of organizations* (Vol. 31, pp. 58). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Battilana, J., & Lee, M. (2014). Advancing research on hybrid organizing – Insights from the study of social enterprises. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 8(1), 777–799.
- Benneworth, P. (2018). *Universities and regional economic development: Engaging with the periphery*. London: Taylor & Francis.

- Benneworth, P., Pinheiro, R., & Karlsen, J. (2017). Strategic agency and institutional change: Investigating the role of universities in regional innovation systems (RISs). *Regional Studies*, *51*(2), 235–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2016.1215599>
- Bercovitz, J., & Feldman, M. (2008). Academic entrepreneurs: Organizational change at the individual level. *Organization Science*, *19*(1), 69–89. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1070.0295>
- Berg, L. N., & Pinheiro, R. (2016). Handling different institutional logics in the public sector: Comparing management in Norwegian universities and hospitals. In R. Pinheiro, F. Ramirez, K. Vrabæk, & L. Geschwind (Eds.), *Towards a comparative institutionalism: Forms, dynamics and logics across health care and higher education fields* (pp. 145–168). Bingley: Emerald.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. London: Penguin Books.
- Brush, C., de Bruin, A., & Welter, F. (2009). A gender-aware framework for female entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, *1*(1), 8–24.
- Buse, C., Martin, D., & Nettleton, S. (2018). Conceptualising “materialities of care”: Making visible mundane material culture in health and social care contexts. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *40*(2), 243–255.
- DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. (1983). The Iron Cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, *48*, 147–160.
- Edelman, L. F., Manolova, T., Shirokova, G., & Tsukanova, T. (2016). The impact of family support on young entrepreneurs’ start-up activities. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *31*(4), 428–448.
- Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962–1023. <https://doi.org/10.1086/231294>
- Garud, R., & Karnøe, P. (2003). Bricolage versus breakthrough: Distributed and embedded agency in technology entrepreneurship. *Research Policy*, *32*(2), 277–300. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333\(02\)00100-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(02)00100-2)
- Granovetter, M. (2005). The impact of social structure on economic outcomes. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *19*(1), 33–50.
- Greenwood, R., Díaz, A. M., Li, S. X., & Lorente, J. C. (2010). The multiplicity of institutional logics and the heterogeneity of organizational responses. *Organization Science*, *21*(2), 521–539. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0453>
- Gunasekara, C. (2006). The generative and developmental roles of universities in regional innovation systems. *Science and Public Policy*, *33*(2), 137–150. <https://doi.org/10.3152/1471543067817791187>
- Kloosterman, R., Van Der Leun, J., & Rath, J. (1999). Mixed embeddedness: (In)formal economic activities and immigrant businesses in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *23*(2), 252–266. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00194>
- Krücken, G. (2003). Learning the “new, new thing”: On the role of path dependency in university structures. *Higher Education*, *46*(3), 315–339. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1025344413682>
- Lawrence, T. B., Suddaby, R., & Leca, B. (2009). *Institutional work: Actors and agency in institutional studies of organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (2011). The logic of appropriateness. In C. Boix & S. C. Stokes (Eds.), *The Oxford handbooks of political science, public policy, comparative politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Neffke, F., Hartog, M., Boschma, R., & Henning, M. (2018). Agents of structural change: The role of firms and entrepreneurs in regional diversification. *Economic Geography*, 94(1), 23–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00130095.2017.1391691>
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. (2003). *The external control of organisations: A resource-dependence perspective*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books.
- Pinheiro, R. (2012). *In the region, for the region? A comparative study of the institutionalisation of the regional mission of universities*. (PhD dissertation). Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Pinheiro, R., Bennenworth, P., & Jones, G. A. (2015). Beyond the obvious: Tensions and volitions surrounding the contributions of universities to regional development. In L. Farinha, J. Ferreira, H. Lawton-Smith, & S. Bagchi-Sen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on global competitive advantage through innovation and entrepreneurship* (pp. 150–172). Hershey, PA: IGI.
- Pinheiro, R., & Normann, R. (2017). Agency, networks and complexity: The many roles of academic institutions in regional development coalition building. *EKONOMIAZ. Revista vasca de Economía*, 92(2), 68–85.
- Pinheiro, R., Normann, R., & Johnsen, H. C. G. (2017). External engagement and the academic heartland: The case of a regionally-embedded university. *Science and Public Policy*, 43(6), 787–797. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scw020>
- Pinheiro, R., Young, M., & Sima, K. (2018). *Higher education and regional development: Tales from Northern and Central Europe*. Cham: Palgrave.
- Scott, W. R. (2008). *Institutions and organizations*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publications.
- Sørensen, M. P., Geschwind, L., Kekäle, J., & Pinheiro, R. (2019). *The responsible university: Exploring the Nordic context and beyond*. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Steen, M. (2016). Reconsidering path creation in economic geography: Aspects of agency, temporality and methods. *European Planning Studies*, 24(9), 1605–1622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2016.1204427>
- Thomas, E., & Asheim, B. T. (2022). Entrepreneurial ecosystems, learning regions and the role of universities. In C. I. Fernandes, M. Ramirez-Pasillas, & J. J. Ferreira (Eds.), *The role of universities and their entrepreneurial ecosystems in advocating sustainability* (pp. 11–24). Berlin: De Gruyter. ISBN: 9783110670165. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110670219-002>
- Thornton, P., & Ocasio, W. (2008). Institutional logics. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, S. K. Andersen, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational institutionalism*. CA: Sage.