

# 57 The other side of knowledge transfer - science officers in local governments

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## Research Domains

International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

## Abstract

Universities and science more generally play an increasingly important role for cities' wellbeing in the knowledge society. While much research exists on the interplay between research institutions and different partners, e.g. the local economy ("clusters"), especially in the context of transfer and third mission, the role of city administrations has not yet been sufficiently investigated, at least not in the German context.

In our project "Town & Gown" we therefore conducted the first survey on what we call "science officers": people within city administrations responsible to organize a structured exchange between cities and their local research institutions. The survey was supplemented by case studies and in-depth expert interviews in a smaller number of cities.

Our results show a dense and growing network between city administrations and their HEI's as well as some hindering and fostering factors for a successful partnership.

## Full paper

Knowledge transfer is one of the major challenges that HEIs increasingly have to face (Berghaeuser & Hoelscher 2019). For a long time, transfer was understood primarily as a transfer of technology into the economy, but it is defined much more broadly today (e.g. Compagnucci & Spigarelli 2020). HEIs are not only research and education institutions, but also an important economic and social factor ("third mission"). For example, as significant employers and building owners, HEIs have to take on new responsibilities in their hosting city with regard to sustainability issues or the local rent market (e.g. Marquardt 2019; Smith 2008).

But HEIs are only one side of the transfer medal within cities – local governments are the other. While some cities in Germany already proactively include science in their city marketing (e.g. Münster), others are not yet aware of the potential that lies in their own research institutions. This has been changing for about 15 years. Science has become more visible in the urban society, for example through such initiatives as the "Stadt der Wissenschaft". To support these processes, city councils are setting up new positions for cooperation with science institutions. Science officers establish contact with research institutions situated in their own city and connect scientists, society and local economy. But how do they work together? Whereas there is a lot of research on the role of universities within the hosting city or the own region (Benneworth et al. 2010; Tripl 2015), virtually no research is done on the city side yet.

In our research project "Town & Gown" at the German University of Administrative Sciences, Speyer, we addressed this lacuna for the German context for the first time and therefore in a mainly exploratory manner. The main research questions are a) to what extent do city administrations in Germany engage in a structured exchange with their research institutions, b) what is the context and form of this cooperation and c) which factors foster a good relationship.

To answer these questions, we draw on four different data sources. First, a comprehensive (international) literature review was performed, supporting our claim of a research gap. Second, a survey with science officers in 80 German cities was held in 2020 and provides an overview of how the issue is anchored in city administrations. To get a more fine-grained picture, we, third, conducted short case studies on a similar set of cities based on desk research (Marquardt & Gerhard 2021) as well as, fourth, some more in-depth interviews in two cities. By combining these quantitative and qualitative data we can demonstrate a dense network between city councils and their HEIs working together to move the city further and make it fit for the challenges of the future.

In our presentation we would like to present the broader context of city-HEI-relations as well as descriptive results from our research. The aim for the discussion would be to compare the German context to the UK one.

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