Erasmus Centre for Valorisation

From knowledge to impact

Introduction

In the past few years, universities have been increasingly challenged to make their academic knowledge usable outside their circles of colleagues and students. Parties interested in this type of - applied - expertise are companies, government bodies, social organisations and the general public. This utilisation of knowledge, including the forging of new connections between science and private and public parties aimed at arriving at innovative solutions for economic and social issues, is referred to as knowledge valorisation, or the process of value creation, with 'value' thus not only being viewed as the economic, but also as the social and cultural deployment of this academic knowledge.

Definition and context

The Association of Universities in the Netherlands has defined valorisation as:

The process of creating value from academic knowledge, by making knowledge suitable and/or useful for economic and social purposes and translating this knowledge into competitive products, services, processes and new enterprise.

The issue of knowledge valorisation represents a major challenge for the Netherlands. The quality of knowledge at Dutch universities has an outstanding international reputation. However, universities have insufficiently developed their capacity to make ground-breaking knowledge available and suitable for applications in new socially and economically relevant products, processes and services. This is referred to as the Dutch knowledge paradox.

Valorisation can keep the Netherlands’ economic motor running as well as facilitate the further expansion of our knowledge society. It therefore important that we examine how to raise the level of the utilisation of our academic knowledge to the same qualitatively high level of the knowledge itself.

EUR's vision

Valorisation is not an automatic process and requires a well-considered, interactive and iterative process, both within the university and in relation to public and private sector organisations. Valorisation can only succeed as a structured process if it is produced by and embedded in outstanding scientific research. The concept of the Societal Valorisation Value Chain® (SVVC®) is applied in this context. This concept was designed by professors Claasen and Commandeur of Erasmus University Rotterdam.

The SVVC®, referred to further as the valorisation chain, is in fact a chain with five links. For valorisation to be successful and eventually impact society at large, the following links need to be deployed in conjunction with each other:

1. Societal and social valorisation (creating social and cultural value);
2. Contract research/education: economic valorisation (economic utilisation of knowledge);
3. Knowledge workplace (the link between the academic and non-academic worlds);
4. Initial knowledge transfer/education (knowledge for knowledge); and
5. Curiosity-driven, fundamental research (knowledge for knowledge).
The bottom link of the chain (fundamental research) is the foundation of the valorisation strategy. It is believed that eventually only outstanding science will be able to produce valorisation that is credible and of high quality, thus making scientific curiosity the basis for social validation. It is therefore essential that the valorisation chain is continuously underpinned by excellent research. Should this not be the case, valorisation will become a slowly dying star.

It is vital that we have a cyclical and interactive model based on mutual interaction in the various stages of the valorisation chain. For the rest, the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. All links of the valorisation chain must be of outstanding quality if high-quality valorisation is to result. It is clear that EUR’s academic prima donnas with a broad valorisation profile are just as important for EUR in a quantitative sense (profiling and production) as in a quantitative sense (internal examples to others and drivers for the implementation of the chosen valorisation strategy).

In the spotlight: knowledge workplace

Academic knowledge only becomes ‘value’-able when it is shared not only with colleagues but made accessible and useful for the commercial and social sectors. To enable an open collaboration and exchange of people and ideas between the worlds of research, education and the commercial and social sectors, it is vital that we create meeting places. The third link of the valorisation chain (the knowledge workplace) addresses this point.

The foundation of knowledge workplaces fits in a trend in which partnerships between the university, commerce, government bodies and social organisations are becoming ever more important. After all, a knowledge workplace represents structural, multi-year collaboration between these parties.
The basic principle behind a knowledge workplace is that the development and use of knowledge are not divorced from one another. The workplace explicitly seeks to harness existing knowledge and experiences when tackling problems facing society and the business sector ('co-creation' of knowledge).

The starting point in workplace activities is always knowledge issues and other questions we deal with in practice. By creating a learning/knowledge infrastructure and forging cooperation between all parties, we can tackle complex issues, stimulate scientific knowledge development and foster innovation in products, services and facilities in the sector involved. This will bring science and policy, as well as theory and practice, closer together.