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Poster abstract

From Isolation to Collaboration: Advancing Demand-Driven Knowledge Transfer in European University Alliances

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Abstract

Universities are increasingly expected to contribute to society beyond their traditional teaching and research roles (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020; Kitagawa et al., 2016). To help fulfil this Third Mission, Technology Transfer Offices (TTO) are asked to act as proactive facilitators of innovation, capable of sensing and acting on societal and market demands (Amry et al., 2021; Borrás et al., 2024). Prior research has highlighted how individual TTOs reconfigure their dynamic capabilities to help capture and address economic and social challenges, focusing on mature TTOs cases with similar profiles (Chen et al., 2024; Roncancio-Marin & Guerrero, 2024).

European University Alliances present a unique opportunity to shift the perspective on TTO dynamic capabilities reconfiguration—from an isolated process within single units to a collaborative process occurring within networks of institutions with varying maturity levels and resources. Capitalising on this unique opportunity, this study asks: *How can universities collaborate within European University Alliances to facilitate the transition towards a demand-driven knowledge transfer model?*

Using qualitative methods, we analysed data from the ten universities of the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance, collected as part of the Horizon 2020 YUFERING project. YUFE's knowledge transfer systems differ in experience and capacity: the oldest TTO dates to 1985, the youngest to 2021, with staff sizes ranging from 1.5 to 20 full-time equivalents. Data collection (September 2021–November 2023) included surveys, in-depth interviews with knowledge transfer practitioners, and focus groups.

The study contributes to theory and practice by providing in-depth insights into the barriers TTOs face in transitioning to a demand-driven knowledge transfer model, as well as their needs and expectations regarding European University Alliances. It also highlights key areas for enhancing inter-TTO cooperation, including joint talent management and smart specialisation aligned with alliance-level strategic focus areas.