

# The Legal Framework and Potential Opportunities of Public Universities in Albania for Providing Services to Third Parties

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## Abstract

Public universities in Albania play an important role in serving the community and in training professionals who contribute to the economic and social development of the country. Law no. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015 "On higher education and scientific research in institutions of higher education in the Republic of Albania" describes universities as centers of knowledge and innovation, with the mission to guarantee equal opportunities in education and to promote social cohesion. Furthermore, these universities offer an environment where teaching is combined with scientific research, preparing students for the challenges of the global labor market and strengthening ties with the community. However, the legal framework of services for third parties from these institutions remains unclear and often unimplemented. This article will examine the legal framework and practical obstacles that public universities face when providing services to third parties, as well as the benefits of international cooperation. Analyzing successful international practices and proposing strategic improvements, the study suggests that improving the legal framework and incorporating effective strategies can help Albanian universities play a wider role in serving the community and securing sustainable financial resources. The methodology used in this study is based on descriptive and comparative methods.

**Keywords:** services to third parties, legal framework, legal challenges, economic development, social cohesion, public universities.

**JEL Classification:** K10, K33

## 1. Introduction

In accordance with Article 1 of Law No. 80/2015,<sup>3</sup> public universities in Albania are entrusted with the crucial responsibility of serving the community through the advancement of higher education and the protection of knowledge<sup>4</sup>. These institutions serve as centers of knowledge and innovation, forming qualified specialists who contribute to the economic and social development of the country. Their mission includes ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals who wish to benefit from higher

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<sup>3</sup> Law No. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015, "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania," Communication Progress. (2024). QBZ - Official Publications Center. Retrieved from <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2015/164>.

<sup>4</sup> See some reflections in Nano, Xhesila, Drilona Mulaj, Dorina Kripa, and Brunilda Duraj. 2024. "Entrepreneurial Education and Sustainability: Opportunities and Challenges for Universities in Albania" *Administrative Sciences* 14, no. 6: 122. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14060122>. Regarding the modern path of knowledge see Săraru, Cătălin Silviu & Popa Tache, Cristina Elena (2024). „Knowledge Ecosystems in the Digital Age on Reshaping Administrative and International Law”. *Journal of Knowledge Dynamics*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 81-91. <https://doi.org/10.56082/jkd.2024.2.81>.

education, thereby helping to strengthen social cohesion and increase opportunities for individuals in the community. Thus, universities contribute to strengthening public and national security, supporting strategic development priorities. Integrating teaching with scientific research helps develop a practical and problem-oriented education.

The importance and growth of international cooperation in higher education, as provided for in Law No. 80/2015, brings very good experiences and practices that help students integrate into the global labor market. Despite the role and opportunities, the legal and regulatory framework for the provision of services to third parties by public universities remains unclear and is not implemented in practice.

The aim of this article is to analyze the legal framework and possibilities for the provision of services by Albanian public universities, based on current legislation as well as international practices related to this activity. Analyzing the legal framework as well as identifying the opportunities and challenges that Albanian public universities face in providing services to third parties is a topic that represents innovation in scientific research in the academic world of the Republic of Albania.

In addition, the article presents national and international models and practices that can contribute to a more effective implementation of the existing legal framework, at the end providing some concrete recommendations related to the identified problems.

The specific objectives of the study in this article include:

1. Analyzing the current legal framework in Albania related to the autonomy of public universities for providing services to third parties.
2. Identification of practical and legal challenges that prevent the implementation of these provisions in Albanian public universities.
3. Evaluation of the best national and international practices as well as suitable opportunities for the development of services in Albanian universities.
4. Proposals in the form of recommendations to promote the provision of services and the creation of sustainable financial resources for universities.

Based on the above objectives, this article will try to answer the research questions that lead the study. The research questions raised are:

1. How does the current Albanian law regulate the provision of services by public universities to third parties?
2. What are the main legal and practical challenges faced by Albanian public universities in this process?
3. What are the successful international practices (models) that can be adapted and implemented in the Albanian context?
4. How can the regulatory legal framework be improved and what can be the strategies to support Albanian universities in providing these services sustainably and effectively?

The originality of the study lies in its double focus, which includes not just the assessment of the existing legal framework and its challenges but also the identification of new opportunities for Albanian universities, which have remained largely unexploited. Through comparative analysis with international practices, the article offers a recent and unique perspective on the role that universities can play in delivering services to the private and public sectors, as well as in the active involvement of students in practical activities.

The importance of public universities in Albania as institutions that provide

services to third parties is indisputable. They not only contribute to the formation of qualified specialists but also play a key role in the economic and social development of the country.<sup>5</sup>

To maximize this potential, it is essential to address the legal and practical challenges that hinder service delivery, building on a legal framework that is widely implemented in practice. This article will examine these issues, providing a detailed analysis and recommendations for improvement, so that Albanian universities can be active contributors in the service of the community.

## **2. The current legal framework in Albania for the provision of services by public universities**

The Law on Higher Education, laying the foundation for the development of services to third parties, was an important step for the autonomy of public universities in Albania. The current legal framework for the provision of services by public universities in Albania reflects a clear commitment to strengthen the role of these institutions as main actors in social and economic development.

Law no. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015 "*On higher education and scientific research in higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania*", constitutes the legal basis that guarantees the rights and responsibilities of higher education institutions to generate income and provide specialized services. Point 3, letter (a) of Article 3, states that higher education institutions must develop activities that bring income, contribute to self-financing, and improve services for students and the community. Article 18, point 4, stipulates that income-generating activities must be in line with the strategic priorities of each institution, thus ensuring that each initiative is oriented towards its mission. Also, article 59, point 1, and article 95, point 5, and sanction the right to offer specialized services, positioning the university as an important source of knowledge and competencies at the service of society. These provisions create a clear framework for the institutions' activities, encouraging cooperation with the public and private sectors.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Article 109, point 1, letter (c), and point 2<sup>7</sup>, emphasize the importance of developing strategies that allow the effective use of resources and the provision of high-quality services. This legal framework encourages not only the development of services but also provides a favorable environment for innovation and the creation of new opportunities for students and the community in general.

Although, public universities in Albania are positioned as key actors in strengthening the links between education and sustainable development.<sup>8</sup> However, the

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<sup>5</sup> Article 1, letter (What) of Law No. 80/2015 in Albania, defines the mission of higher education institutions as creating, developing, and transmitting knowledge and supporting social, economic, and cultural development. This mission emphasizes the responsibility of institutions to contribute to both personal and societal advancement, fostering a well-rounded education that meets the needs of a democratic society.

<sup>6</sup> Article 3, point 3(a), Article 18, point 4, Article 59, point 1, and Article 95, point 5, of the Law No. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015. *On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania*. Communication Progress. (2024). Official Publications Center (QBZ). Retrieved from <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2015/164>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem* Article 109, point 1(c) and point 2

<sup>8</sup> Universities and Sustainable Development Towards the Global Goals. (n.d.). Universities: Getting ready for the SDGs. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/universities-getting-ready-sdgsity> Association. (n.d.). See also Universities and sustainable development: Towards the global goals. <https://>

practical implementation of this legal framework is challenged by complicated financial and procedural rules.

Universities often encounter obstacles in managing the income they can generate from the services they provide, due to the lack of clear legal and regulatory guidelines. This leads to uncertainty about meeting tax obligations, as well as difficulties in organizing the necessary structures that would enable the provision of sustainable and legal services. Statutes of the University of Tirana (UT)<sup>9</sup> and Polytechnic University of Tirana (UPT)<sup>10</sup> allow the faculty and research units of these institutions to offer services through specialized laboratories and centers. These services include technical expertise and consulting, which provide opportunities for these universities to build close relationships with the private and public sectors and promote practical experience and specialized knowledge.

In 2024, UT adopted a new regulation on the administration of fees for services to third parties<sup>11</sup>, establishing a fee structure for consulting, research, and other academic services. This initiative aims to increase the capacities of UT to actively contribute to the economic and social development of the country through the transfer of knowledge and innovation, creating a sustainable mechanism for managing income and rewarding academic staff engaged in providing services. On the other hand, UPT has consolidated experience in providing technical oppositions for construction projects, an activity that dates back to 2010 and is based on law no. 8402 "On control and discipline of construction works".<sup>12</sup> In this context, technical opposition for projects with high construction values is a mandatory requirement, and UPT fulfills this task as one of the institutions approved for the provision of these services, bringing a significant impact on the construction sector and infrastructure security.

With the Order of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy of 2019, it has been determined that technical oppositions for public projects will be carried out by the Institute of Construction and UPT, further strengthening the role of the university in the public sector and ensuring that these services are carried out by institutions with the right capacity and expertise.<sup>13</sup> In addition, by the *Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 188, dated 13.03.2019*,<sup>14</sup> UPT has expanded its range of services to include design and technical consultancy for central government institutions and those of their

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[www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities-and-sustainable-development-towards-the-global-goals.pdf](http://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities-and-sustainable-development-towards-the-global-goals.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> University of Tirana. (2018). *Statute of the University of Tirana*, Article 7, Retrieved from [https://unitir.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Statuti\\_2018.pdf](https://unitir.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Statuti_2018.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> University of Polytechnics of Tirana. (n.d.). *The Statute of the Polytechnic University of Tirana*. Retrieved from <https://upt.edu.al/legjislacioni/statuti/>.

<sup>11</sup> University of Tirana. (n.d.). *Regulation on the administration of the service fee system for third parties at the University of Tirana*. Retrieved from <https://unitir.edu.al/rregullore-mbi-administrimin-e-sistemit-tarifave-te-sherbimeve-ndaj-te-treteve-ne-universitetin-e-tiranes/>

<sup>12</sup> Law No. 8402 on the Control and Discipline of Construction Works. Retrieved from <https://planifikimi.gov.al/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=2432&token=40ca55129b1cb5291e0389fc01c937a92c68b3ea>.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy. (2019). *Order No. 243 on the determination of technical reviews for public projects by the Institute of Construction and UPT*. Retrieved from <https://upt.al/images/artikuj%20menuje/transparenca/sherbime-ap/urdher-MIE-243-2019.PDF>.

<sup>14</sup> Council of Ministers. (2019). *Decision no. 188, dated March 13, 2019, amended for the provision of services by public higher education institutions, in accordance with their activities, for central government institutions, dependent institutions, and local self-government units*. <https://fdut.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Vendimi-I-KM-Nr.-188-dat%C3%AB-13032019.pdf>.

dependencies. This decision allows the services of public universities to harmonize with the needs of public governance, helping to realize construction and technical projects with national impact and helping universities to develop sustainable financial and infrastructural capacities.

UPT has concluded a series of cooperation agreements with various institutions for the performance of technical reviews. These agreements were carried out by the Faculty of Civil Engineering until 20.06.2019, when it was decided that the technical oppositions would be carried out at the institution level, by the *Order of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy No. 243, dated 12.06.2019*.<sup>15</sup> This order stipulates that for all public projects, the technical opposition will be carried out by the Institute of Construction and UPT, further strengthening the role of the university in this process. The Polytechnic University of Tirana (UPT) has created a successful model for providing specialized services to public and private institutions, focusing mainly on technical oppositions and design.<sup>16</sup> Through this commitment, UPT strengthens cooperation with the public sector, helping to realize large infrastructure projects that require advanced expertise and technical security. UPT is the only example (so far) implemented in Albania of how public universities can structure regulatory acts to provide services that match their areas of expertise and that help the development of different sectors in Albania. This practice also illustrates a successful model that can be used by other universities to establish close links with industry and contribute to meeting the countries' economic and social development needs through an integrated approach to knowledge and innovation.

This approach constitutes an example for other institutions of higher education in Albania, illustrating how these institutions can create effective partnerships with public institutions to increase the impact on the social and economic development of the country. This practice shows the potential that universities have to meet the needs of society, providing standardized services and oriented towards sustainable development.

However, the lack of internal acts in most other public institutions of higher education constitutes an obvious obstacle to the full development of the potential of universities in the service of the community. This situation underlines one of the main challenges of this article, which is the impossibility of consistently providing services to third parties in the absence of a clear legal and regulatory framework in all public universities of Albania. An important aspect of the legal framework is that of the Public Procurement Law, which requires universities to fulfill a series of criteria and procedures to ensure transparency and fair competition in the provision of services.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, regulatory acts related to the protection of personal data and security standards in the provision of services require universities to be prepared to manage sensitive information and to respect the rights of individuals.<sup>18</sup> This is particularly

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<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy. (2019). Order No. 243 on the determination of technical reviews for public projects by the Institute of Construction and UPT.

<sup>16</sup> Institute of Construction. (n.d.). *Package of services*. Retrieved from <https://upt.al/images/artikuj%20menuje/transparenca/sherbime-ap/paketa-sherbimet.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Albanian Public Procurement Agency. (n.d.). *Public procurement law*. Retrieved from <https://www.app.gov.al/legjislacioni/prokurimi-publik/ligji/>.

<sup>18</sup> Not all universities have adopted regulations based on the current legal framework, which impacts compliance with data protection and security standards necessary for handling sensitive information and safeguarding individual rights. The privacy policy of Polytechnic University of Tirana outlines measures to

important in the context of providing services that require direct interactions with individuals or organizations. Each clause that is included in the Service Contract must be explained according to the nature of the service, the purpose, and the interests of the parties. For example, the parties may refer to a Confidentiality Agreement if the sharing of confidential information is necessary for the performance of the services.<sup>19</sup> Last but not least, the contract should explain what happens if there is a breach by either party.

In the context of the *Education Strategy in Albania 2021-2026*<sup>20</sup>, has a particular focus on strengthening links between universities and communities. This strategy encourages the provision of services that contribute to sustainable development and innovation, emphasizing the role of universities as centers of knowledge that help improve the quality of life for citizens.

This is in line with *Article 13 of the Council of Europe's Higher Education Recommendation*, which encourages universities to provide services that support sustainable development and innovation.<sup>21</sup> The Law on Higher Education emphasizes the importance of international cooperation for increasing the quality of education and strengthening research capacities.<sup>22</sup> One of the main examples of this commitment is the Erasmus+ programs<sup>23</sup>, which encourages the exchange of students and academic staff, promoting the transfer of knowledge and the creation of partnerships, consortia, or alliances with European institutions of higher education.

Participation in Erasmus+ projects<sup>24</sup> has helped Albanian universities to increase the capacities of academic staff and their expertise through training and exchange of experiences. However, administrative and bureaucratic challenges continue to hinder the efficient implementation of ongoing project completion that is directly related to the sustainability of the acquired models. Active participation in Erasmus+ programs shows the potential of Albanian universities to contribute to the development of society and to improve the quality of higher education.

Thus, the current legal framework in Albania for the provision of services by public universities is complex and often complicated. While the Law on Higher

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ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and protection of personal data, in compliance with Albanian data protection laws. It covers data collection practices, user rights, and security standards implemented by the university to safeguard information in its operations and services. Polytechnic University of Tirana. (n.d.). *Privacy policies*. <https://upt.edu.al/legjislacioni/politikat-e-privatesise/>.

<sup>19</sup> (2024). Legit.al. <https://legit.al/dokumenti/kontrata-e-sherbimit/>.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth. (2021). Decision no. 621, dated 22.10.2021, on the approval of the National Quality Framework 2021-2026. [https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Vendim-621\\_date-22.10.2021\\_Per-miratimin-e-SKA-2021-2026.pdf](https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Vendim-621_date-22.10.2021_Per-miratimin-e-SKA-2021-2026.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Council of Europe. (2007). Recommendation on the establishment of a European Higher Education Area (Rec(2007)3). Retrieved from [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Source/Recommendation\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Source/Recommendation_en.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Article 1(e), of the Law No. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015. *On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania*. Communication Progress. (2024). Official Publications Center (QBZ). Retrieved from <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2015/164>.

<sup>23</sup> European Commission. (2019). Western Balkans regional Erasmus+ 2019: Annual report. Retrieved from [https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/westernbalkans-regional-erasmusplus-2019\\_en.pdf](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/westernbalkans-regional-erasmusplus-2019_en.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> See university webpages regarding ongoing projects: University of Tirana. (n.d.). *Projects implemented at UT*. Retrieved November 5, 2024, from <https://unitir.edu.al/projekte-qe-zbatohen-ne-ut/>, University of Aleksandër Moisiu of Durrës. (n.d.). *Current projects*. Retrieved November 5, 2024, from <https://uamd.edu.al/projektet-aktuale/> University of European Tirana. (n.d.). *Portfolio of projects: 20 active and about 45 in the application process*. Retrieved November 5, 2024, from <https://uet.edu.al/portofoli-i-projekteve-uet-20-aktive-dhe-rreth-45-ne-proces-aplikimi/> etc.

Education provides a legal basis for the development of these services, there is a need for a detailed review of the regulations and procedures governing revenue management and service delivery. This will help create a more favorable environment for universities, enabling them to use their capacities in the service of the community and sustainable development.

The management of intellectual property represents a further crucial element of research and innovation activity in public universities. The Law on Higher Education, in conjunction with Law No. 9883, dated 10 March 2008, "*On Industrial Property*", establishes a significant legal framework for the administration of these rights.<sup>25</sup> This law regulates the protection of industrial property in Albania, determining the procedures and standards for the registration of intellectual products as well as the protection of the rights of their owners.

In the context of universities, the Law on Higher Education provides that the intellectual property rights created by academic staff and students are regulated by by-laws that are approved by the relevant educational institutions. This means that universities must draw up clear acts and procedures for the management of intellectual property, which include procedures for registration, protection, and exploitation of intellectual property rights created within their academic units.<sup>26</sup>

In the interpretation of Article 2 of Law No. 80/2015 regarding intellectual property rights, the norm guarantees the right of universities to benefit financially from intellectual creations and innovations that originate from their research and scientific activity. This includes income from patents, trademarks, and other intellectual rights, allowing these institutions to capitalize on scientific and innovative achievements. This provision supports an environment that encourages the creation of intellectual property in higher education and stimulates financial independence through legal and sustainable mechanisms.<sup>27</sup>

Although law No. 80/2015 on higher education regulates the way public universities operate, including financial and academic autonomy, and the right to make independent decisions regarding research, teaching, and provision of services to third parties, there are significant limitations that complicate the effective use of this autonomy.

The above constitutes a stable legal basis for the autonomy of public universities in Albania to provide services to third parties, the challenges remain great in terms of practical implementation and the creation of a stable framework of internal rules and procedures. The lack of clarity in the guidelines for revenue collection and management and the structuring of services prevents universities from realizing their full potential to contribute to the community and generate sustainable income. In particular, Albanian universities do not yet have a consolidated tradition of developing clear agreements with the private sector.

In contrast, the legal framework in the US, through the Association of Public

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<sup>25</sup> Albanian Parliament. (2008). *Law No. 9883, dated March 10, 2008, on industrial property*. Retrieved from <https://ishmt.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/LigjiNr9947-P%C3%ABr.pron%C3%ABsin%C3%AB.idustriale-p%C3%ABrdit%C3%ABsuar.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Article 95, of the Law No. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015. *On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania*. Communication Progress. (2024). Official Publications Center (QBZ). Retrieved from <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2015/164>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* Article 2.

and Land-grant Universities (APLU), not only allows the provision of services to third parties but also encourages it, creating a deep and structured relationship with the private sector. In the US, universities act more as empowered centers of innovation and economic development for the community.<sup>28</sup>

In the UK, public universities also have a strong role in community service and partnerships with the private sector. Universities UK points out that universities have broad powers to establish direct agreements with the private sector. In comparison, Albanian universities are slower to implement these collaborations and the lack of flexibility in Albanian law limits the development of such services. While the United Kingdom encourages innovation and assistance to the private sector, Albania has yet to adopt this model.<sup>29</sup>

In France, the Law on Higher Education and Research<sup>30</sup> gives universities greater autonomy to collaborate with the private sector. In contrast, Albanian universities are still limited in this regard, and collaborations with the private sector are not so developed. While laws in France create a supportive environment for partnerships, Albanian universities face bureaucratic obstacles that slow progress.

In Germany, The Higher Education Framework Act<sup>31</sup> provides a model where public universities successfully collaborate with the private sector, encouraging research and innovation. In comparison, Albanian legislation is more rigid, hindering the potential to exploit these opportunities on an equal level with German universities.

The models above show that while countries such as the USA, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany have a legal framework that allows universities to play an important role in the economy and public services, Albania is still in the early stages of developing policies that will 'allowed universities to act similarly. Legal reforms for higher education in Albania are necessary to improve the autonomy of universities and help them provide services to third parties efficiently and without bureaucratic obstacles.

In conclusion, public universities in Albania face great challenges in trying to implement the provisions of the law on higher education in providing services to third parties. While some universities, such as the Polytechnic University of Tirana and the University of Tirana, have regulated and formalized the process of services to third parties, the lack of harmonization throughout the higher education sector is an obstacle to the development of a wide and effective practice of this the model. Through proposals for legal improvements and the creation of clearer structures, Albanian universities can gain more autonomy and flexibility to fulfill their public service mission and generate new sources of income that will further strengthen their role in society.

### **3. Practical and legal challenges faced by public universities in Albania**

A significant challenge facing public universities in Albania is the absence of comprehensive and precise legal acts to operationalize the existing legislative

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<sup>28</sup> Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). n.d.). *About us*. APLU. <https://www.aplu.org/about-us/>.

<sup>29</sup> *What we do*. (n.d.). Universities UK. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do>.

<sup>30</sup> Legifrance. (2013). Official Journal No. 169, July 23, 2013. Retrieved November 5, 2024, from <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/jo/2013/07/23/0169>.

<sup>31</sup> Hochschulkompass, (n.d.). Higher education law. Retrieved November 5, 2024, from <https://www.hochschulkompass.de/en/higher-education-institutions/higher-education-landscape/higher-education-law.html>.

framework. While the Law on Higher Education and university statutes establish a foundational legal structure, the lack of specific regulatory guidance on implementation hinders consistent application. This gap in detailed procedural regulations has led to partial or inconsistent enactment of the legal framework across institutions, resulting in confusion and ambiguity in governance and operational practices.

A study of Qëndresa Qytetare shows that in three years of monitoring the educational processes, through the analyses carried out, several problems related to the lack of issuance and implementation of the by-laws of Law 80/2015.<sup>32</sup> Thus, universities often face difficulties in interpreting and implementing the legal framework, hindering the development of a clear and efficient management system. This situation leads to a deterioration in the quality of services or their absence and negatively affects the reputation of institutions.

A fundamental challenge is the tension between the financial autonomy provided for in the law and the dependence of universities on public funding. The Law on Higher Education gives universities financial autonomy to manage their resources, but many universities are still dependent on funding provided by the Ministry of Education.<sup>33</sup> This dependence affects their ability to develop sustainable resources and provide specialized services.

University Accreditation Reports point out that universities often do not have the necessary structures for the provision of services, including laboratories and other necessary infrastructures.<sup>34</sup> This situation not only hinders the development of institutions but also undermines their capacity to contribute to the economic and social development of the country.

Moreover, Albanian universities face significant difficulties in their collaborations with the private or public sector. These difficulties are often related to the legal bureaucracies and complex procedures required to establish cooperation agreements. The lack of clarity and relevant guidelines in the laws governing these relationships has hindered the development of innovative services.

An article by Chankseliani et al.<sup>35</sup> analyzes the role of universities in supporting local, national, and global development in different contexts, including Georgia and Kazakhstan. Through education, research, and community engagement, these institutions contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the preparation of skilled professionals and the promotion of social equality. However, the article points out that limitations on institutional autonomy and academic freedom limit universities' ability to fully meet these developmental goals.

This international perspective shows how Albanian universities face similar

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<sup>32</sup> 5 Years from the Reform in Higher Education. (n.d.). Retrieved October 24, 2024, from <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/16981.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Education and Sports. (2018). Decision No. 75, February 12, 2018: Formula for financing higher education institutions. Retrieved from [https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Vendim-i-KM\\_75\\_12.02.2018-Foprmula-e-financimi-IAL.pdf](https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Vendim-i-KM_75_12.02.2018-Foprmula-e-financimi-IAL.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> ASCAL, Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. (n.d.). Report on quality assurance in higher education: A case study from Albania. Retrieved from [https://www.ascal.al/media/documents/publikime/Report\\_QAA\\_ASCAL.pdf](https://www.ascal.al/media/documents/publikime/Report_QAA_ASCAL.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Chankseliani, M., Qoraboyev, I., & Gimranova, D. (2020). „Higher education contributing to local, national, and global development: new empirical and conceptual insights”. *Higher Education*, 81(1), 109–127. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00565-8>.

challenges and highlights the importance of policies that support autonomy to enhance the role of universities in economic and social development. Another challenge is the lack of clarity on the jurisdiction and division of the income that universities generate from the services provided. Universities face difficulties in managing these revenues and determining how they will be divided between the university and the respective faculty. This has resulted in disagreements and tensions within the institutions. The practical and legal challenges facing public universities in Albania are complex and multidimensional. The lack of clear guidelines, the conflict between financial autonomy and dependence on financial resources, difficulties in collaborations with the private sector, and issues of jurisdiction over income are some of the obstacles that require an immediate solution.

The creation of a clearer legal and institutional framework is necessary to address these challenges and to strengthen the capacities of universities to provide quality and innovative services. To achieve this, it is recommended to develop internal policies that clearly define how copyright, intellectual property, and revenue sharing will be handled, as well as the creation of a collaboration platform between universities and the private sector, which will help improve services and increase innovative capacities. Another important aspect is the challenge of brokering fees and managing the income that universities generate from services to the public and private sectors.

*Decision No. 188 of the Council of Ministers* gives universities a degree of autonomy to set fees and manage revenues from the services provided, requiring approval from boards of administration and support in public procurement procedures in cases where established standards are not met.<sup>36</sup> This decision also requires the establishment of internal procedures for staff remuneration and revenue sharing, which often encounter difficulties in implementation due to complex rules and high bureaucracy, thus creating delays in services to public institutions and in cooperation with the private sector. In the decision of the *Council of Ministers No. 188, dated 13.3.2019*, some important changes were made in March 2024 that help to clarify and expand the services offered by public institutions of higher education for the central government and local self-government units.

First, the change in the title of the decision reflects a broader focus on service delivery, including a range of activities such as consultancy and training. Second, the clear definition of responsibilities for service requests from central government institutions and local self-government units emphasizes the importance of cooperation between higher education institutions and government structures. This will help to strengthen the links between higher education and the practical needs of society, thus contributing to a more sustainable and effective development of public services.

The implementation of these changes requires a strong commitment from the Ministry of Education and Sports, to ensure that these initiatives are implemented as planned. Also of great value is the approach of this article and the study that analyzes the development of the "Third Mission" of higher education institutions in Albania during the academic year 2023-2024<sup>37</sup>, including the contribution of universities to the

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<sup>36</sup> Council of Ministers. (2019). Decision no. 188, dated March 13, 2019, amended for the provision of services by public higher education institutions, in accordance with their activities, for central government institutions, dependent institutions, and local self-government units. <https://fdut.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Vendimi-I-KM-Nr.-188-dat%C3%AB-13032019.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Polis University. (2024). Findings for Albania on the 3rd Mission of HEIs 2023-24. Retrieved from <https://>

economic, social and cultural development of the community, identifies challenges and best practices in the integration of education, research and community services.

The findings suggest increasing financial autonomy through self-generated resources, greater involvement of the private sector, and integration of strategies to respond to market needs. In an international comparison, the *OECD* report on university-industry cooperation<sup>38</sup> suggests that performance-based funding and fiscal incentives for universities can facilitate collaborations with the private sector, fostering innovation and increasing research capacity. International models show that universities with greater autonomy and government-backed policies benefit more from industry linkages and contribute more to economic and social development. The adaptation of these support policies in Albania would enable universities to overcome bureaucratic challenges and create sustainable relationships, benefiting from research activities and innovation projects that contribute to the country's development.

The *OECD* report on university-industry cooperation highlights the importance of supportive policies to improve knowledge transfer.<sup>39</sup> Universities can benefit from mechanisms such as performance-based funding and fiscal incentives, which encourage the creation of relationships with the private sector. Such an approach can increase the impact of the research activities of Albanian universities, including channels such as patents, collaborative research, and innovation projects that contribute to the economic and social development of the country.

#### **4. STARS EU: an innovative model for providing services to citizens in European regions**

STARS EU (*Sustainable Transnational Alliance for the Re-invention of Higher Education*) represents the inaugural university alliance in Albania, committed to enhancing the quality and sustainability of higher education through international partnerships. This alliance includes eight European universities alongside "Aleksandër Moisiu" University of Durrës, forming a robust platform for collaborative development. Coordinated by Hanze University of Applied Sciences, STARS EU aims to strengthen existing partnerships to advance higher education's transformation towards a comprehensive "European University" model.<sup>40</sup> Grounded in fundamental principles and strategic goals, STARS EU supports universities in developing and delivering sustainable, innovative services. This effort leverages modern methodologies and emerging technologies to respond to the diverse demands of both the community and the broader market<sup>41</sup>.

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universitetipolis.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Gjetjet-e-Shqiperise-per-Misionin-e-3-te-ne-IAL-e-2023-24-Findings-for-Albania-on-3-rd-Mission-of-HEI-s-2023-24.pdf.

<sup>38</sup> University-Industry Collaboration New Evidence and Policy Options. (n.d.). Retrieved October 27, 2024, from [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2019/04/university-industry-collaboration\\_0e351ee0/e9c1e648-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2019/04/university-industry-collaboration_0e351ee0/e9c1e648-en.pdf)).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>40</sup> STARS EU. (n.d.). STARS EU: Strategic alliances for regional success. Retrieved from <https://starseu.org>.

<sup>41</sup> For a comparative view about the modern methodologies, see Popa Tache, Cristina Elena & Eduardo Seino Wiviurka, „Designing a Transdisciplinary Legal Curriculum Tailored to Fuse Social, Technological, and Ethical Considerations. Elevating the Voice of International Law”, in Popa Tache, Cristina Elena, Hubert Landier, Leonardo da S.G. Martins da Costa & Mariana Thieriot Loisel (eds.), *For an International*

The initiative fosters a global perspective in addressing contemporary challenges faced by universities, advocating for resource-sharing, knowledge exchange, and the implementation of best practices across international educational institutions. STARS EU encourages universities to deepen their engagement with local communities to deliver solutions that drive economic and social advancement. Such an approach is crucial for establishing enduring connections between academic institutions and various sectors, thereby enriching the societal impact of higher education.<sup>42</sup>

A notable development under STARS EU is the establishment of the Knowledge and Technology Transfer Office (K&TTO), which strengthens academia-industry ties. The K&TTO offers 72 specialized technology services focused on intellectual property, research solutions, and consultancy, thereby promoting sustainable growth within the higher education sector and fostering innovation and business development throughout Europe.<sup>43</sup>

Living Labs represent innovative platforms integrating stakeholders from academia, industry, non-profit organizations, government, and civil society to co-create and evaluate solutions in real-world settings. By embedding Living Labs within universities, STARS EU aims to enhance institutional capacities for applied research, develop sustainable projects, and strengthen collaboration between industry and local communities.<sup>44</sup> Within the STARS EU framework, Living Labs function as incubators for innovative solutions, providing spaces for experimental and user-centered design.<sup>45</sup> UAMD's engagement with STARS EU will contribute to the sustainable advancement of higher education, fortify community relations, and address critical societal challenges. Focused on innovation and collaboration, STARS EU holds transformative potential for Albanian universities to deliver impactful services and contribute to the sustainable development of society.

## **5. International models for the provision of services to third parties by universities**

Many international universities have developed successful practices to secure income sources through providing services to third parties, including commercial services, research projects, and community engagements. These practices can provide valuable examples for Albanian public universities.

The University of Cambridge is one of the best examples of research

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*Transdisciplinary Chair. About the Dialogue Between Culture and Technoscience*, ADJURIS – International Academic Publisher, Bucharest, Paris, Calgary, 2024, p. 90-134, <https://doi.org/10.62768/ADJURIS/2024/2/06>; and Popa Tache, Cristina Elena, Cătălin-Silviu Săraru, Konstantinos Kouroupis, „Different perspectives concerning the right not to use the internet and some analogies with education | Diverse prospettive sul diritto di non usare internet ed alcune analogie con l'istruzione”, in *European Journal of Privacy Law & Technologies* Issue 2024/1.

<sup>42</sup> STARS EU. (n.d.). Objectives. Retrieved from <https://starseu.org/objectives/>.

<sup>43</sup> STARS EU. (n.d.). Knowledge and technology services. Retrieved from <https://starseu.org/knowledge-and-technology-services/>

<sup>44</sup> Bergvall-Kåreborn, B., Eriksson, C. I., Ståhlbröst, A., & Svensson, J. (2009). „A milieu for innovation – Defining living labs”. *International Journal of Innovation and Regional Development*, 1(4), 356-370. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIRD.2009.0227>.

<sup>45</sup> European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL). (2015). Living Labs and open innovation. European Network of Living Labs. <https://enoll.org/>

commercialization through Cambridge Enterprise<sup>46</sup>, which helps the university transfer knowledge from research laboratories to the market. This structure includes the protection of intellectual property rights, the provision of investments for start-ups, and support for the commercialization of academic discoveries. This initiative allows the university to create additional income sources and promote science and technology innovation. For Albanian universities, the commercialization of scientific research could be realized in cooperation with the private sector, creating a similar structure that helps protect and promote local innovations.

Cambridge University Knowledge Exchange Programme<sup>47</sup> has helped build strong relationships between universities and industry to facilitate collaborations in solving economic and social problems. This model includes projects that help the public and private sectors, creating new spaces for the benefit of the parties involved and increasing the impact of the university in the community. This model can be adapted through building partnerships with the public and private sectors, focusing activities in areas that help economic and social development, such as technology and rural development.

At Stanford University and Harvard, students are encouraged to create start-ups and innovative projects through specialized programs such as the Stanford Technology Ventures Program<sup>48</sup> and Harvard Innovation Labs<sup>49</sup>, which provide financial support, mentoring, and training to young entrepreneurs. These initiatives not only prepare the student for the labor market but also provide the opportunity to solve practical problems through innovation. Albanian universities can create similar programs with a focus on specific sectors, such as renewable energy and information technology.

These initiatives can benefit from the support of internationalization or scientific research funds that are made available by AKKSHI and that seek to support local innovation.<sup>50</sup>

The University of California, Berkeley engages students and staff in projects that provide practical solutions to various community problems through Berkeley Research and Public Service<sup>51</sup>, which provides consulting opportunities for government agencies and non-profit organizations.

This approach meets the needs of the community by involving university talent in concrete projects and increasing the practical experience of students. Similar projects involving students and academic staff in solving problems such as employment and sustainable development can be realized by Albanian universities through partnerships with the public sector. At the University of Oxford, the Oxford University Innovation

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<sup>46</sup> Cambridge Enterprise. (2023). Commercializing University Research: Cambridge Model. <https://www.enterprise.cam.ac.uk>.

<sup>47</sup> Knowledge Exchange. (2023). University-Industry Collaboration Models at Cambridge. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research>.

<sup>48</sup> Stanford Technology Ventures. (2022). Fostering Entrepreneurship through STVP. <https://stvp.stanford.edu>.

<sup>49</sup> Harvard Innovation Labs. (2023). Supporting Student Entrepreneurs through Innovation Labs. <https://innovationlabs.harvard.edu>.

<sup>50</sup> National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation. (n.d.). Infrastructure. Retrieved from <https://nasri.gov.al/infrastruktura/>.

<sup>51</sup> Berkeley Public Service. (2023). Berkeley Research and Public Service Initiatives. <https://publicservice.berkeley.edu>.

Centre<sup>52</sup> it helps transfer knowledge and innovation to the private sector, providing income and creating sustainable links with industry.

This model is supported by an advanced research infrastructure and numerous partnerships with large enterprises that support research commercialization projects. Albanian public universities can follow a similar model, starting with small projects and creating partnerships with small and medium-sized enterprises that can benefit from research results. Following the practices and models of international universities, Albanian public universities have the opportunity to adopt some of these approaches to develop new sources of income and improve services to students and the community. This can only be achieved through establishing sustainable partnerships with the private sector, improving research infrastructure, and building platforms for knowledge transfer.<sup>53</sup>

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

Public universities in Albania, while facing significant challenges, possess substantial potential to provide services that address market needs and contribute to the sustainable development of society. An analysis of effective international models, including the STARS EU alliance and Erasmus+ programs, highlights how international partnerships can generate sustainable revenue streams and fortify connections with both private and public sectors.

These collaborative frameworks foster innovation, enhance student opportunities, and engage communities, yielding reciprocal benefits. However, realizing these objectives requires Albanian universities to overcome bureaucratic obstacles, a lack of clear strategies, and resource constraints. Although, continuous commitment to reform, alongside strategic investment in infrastructure and human capital, is essential for harnessing the full potential of these institutions.

To enhance the capacity of public universities in Albania to deliver third-party services and ensure their sustainable development, several strategic recommendations are warranted. Universities should develop and implement targeted strategies that promote their expertise and range of services. This includes organizing initiatives and campaigns to increase awareness of their academic programs and other services, which in turn strengthens connections with the community and industry sectors. Reinforcing partnerships with the private sector is particularly crucial to identifying specific market needs and co-developing projects that are mutually beneficial.

Collaborations with the private sector will not only expand opportunities for students but also facilitate innovative projects that address tangible social and economic challenges. Universities should actively foster an environment that encourages both students and staff to participate in innovative projects and cultivate entrepreneurial competencies. By providing resources and support for those interested in launching start-ups or engaging in social initiatives, universities can contribute to a culture of innovation that extends beyond the institution itself and serves broader societal needs.

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<sup>52</sup> Oxford University Innovation. (2023). Industry Partnerships and Commercialization at Oxford. <https://innovation.ox.ac.uk>.

<sup>53</sup> Knowledge Exchange. (2023). University-Industry Collaboration Models at Cambridge. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research>.

The exploration of self-funding mechanisms, alongside investments in infrastructure and service improvements, should also be a strategic priority. Strengthening internal revenue-generating capabilities can enhance institutional autonomy and contribute to a sustainable operational model. The central government plays an indispensable role in supporting and empowering universities by establishing policies and regulatory frameworks that encourage autonomy and innovation within higher education institutions. Such support would create an enabling environment conducive to the development of new services and practices.

In conclusion, the integration of successful international models would facilitate the creation of services tailored to the Albanian market's specific needs, ultimately establishing a stable revenue base and elevating the quality of education and services provided by public universities.

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