

# **New directions in Latin American university-industry-government interactions**

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## **Abstract**

New directions in university–industry–government interactions are taking place in Latin American countries. The idea that the university should play an economic role is a relatively new one. The articles in this special issue deal with issues involved in establishing the groundwork for this new academic role.

## **Introduction**

The Latin American paradox is that the economic need for a university role in economic development is greater in developed countries but that the ideological and research base to support such an intervention is much narrower. This paradox has shaped the course and direction of university–industry relations in Latin America. It helps explain why the incubator model was imported and re-interpreted prior to the development of technology transfer offices; why centres to arrange contracts were relative failures and why entrepreneurial education is encouraged beyond the business and engineering fields. Latin America has a history emphasizing the university’s political rather than economic role in society. The idea that the university should play an economic role is a relatively new one, apart from a few earlier instances of importation of the US land grant model.

The fundamental issue in Latin America is to create a cultural environment to support the emergence of a variety of new organizational formats to promote economic and social development, including but not limited to new technology-based firms. Ownership of advanced research will be less salient in an environment where the expansion of such research is at a relatively early stage. Conversely, creating mechanisms to promote

economic development will be at the forefront of attention, explaining why the incubator model and its re-conceptualization from a focus on creating high-tech firms in the United States to a broader perspective on training groups of individuals to form low and mid-tech firms, cooperatives and art groups has become widespread. Entrepreneurial education emanating from the incubator movement is another creative development.

The long-term goal is a knowledge-based economy with opportunities and jobs resting on the application of knowledge to enhance economic performance. This objective gives knowledge producing and disseminating institutions a more prominent role in economic development policy than previously envisioned. Thus, the purpose of this special issue is to analyze these experiments, through case studies at the organizational, regional and national levels, and assess their potential for evolution into a fullfledged development paradigm of university–industry–government interactions, amenable to replication.

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