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New Public Management Principles and the Emergence of Third Mission in Italian, Spanish and French Universities

Agnese Desideri, Sandro Landucci, Silvia Pezzoli

Abstract: The aim of this article is to reflect critically on the emergence of the 'Third Mission' in three Higher Education Systems (HEIs) such as the French, the Italian and the Spanish. All of them are characterised by a Napoleonic and centralised mode of governance. Reforms that took place in each country since the 1980s which embrace New Public Management principles, were analysed. Based on a genealogical research design, the analysis of reforms testifies to the transition from a centralized mode of governance to a quasi-market model. The main similarities and internal resistances to the adoption of NPM principles within Third Mission's practices, adopted by the three countries, will be highlighted.

Keywords: New Public Management, Third Mission, Italian, French, Spanish HEIs

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present a literature review on the emergence of the Third Mission in three European countries: France, Spain and Italy.

Existing literature focuses more on Third Mission definitions and implementation (E3M, 2008; Driscoll, 2008; Schoen et al., 2007; Molas-Gallart et al., 2002) than on his emergence. It also focuses much more on the anglo-saxon context (USA and UK)(Rubens et al., 2017) than on other European countries.

We wonder if principles of New Public Management (NPM) are associated with the emergence of the Third Mission in France, Spain and Italy, three European countries characterised by a tradition of centralistic (Napoleonic) mode of governance. We also wonder if there are differences in the implementation of Third Mission practices in these countries.

The research is based on the chronological consultation of various documents, such as laws and regulations, to identify the emergence of the Third Mission in relation to the NPM principles in three European countries.

NPM principles and policies have been introduced in Italy, Spain and France around the 1980s indicating the adaptation of the centralised mode of governance to the neo-liberal one (Donina & Peleari, 2019).

First emerging in the late 1970s as part of a neoliberal economic approach to policy-making known as the 'Washington Consensus', the NPM approach represents a paradigmatic shift away from the notion of public-sector management as 'a process through which policies were formulated, resources allocated, and programs implemented' towards a vision of public sector management being 'a policy issue in its own right' (Barzelay, 2001, p.1 in Mateos-González & Boliver, 2019, p.1).

The NPM shift was a fertile ground for introducing the 'Three Missions University' model. Clark (2001) points out that the 'three mission university model' is a theoretical concept of a 'one-size-fits-all' university model, that conceives of HEIs as organisations with homogeneous and uniform capacities to perform and contribute to social engagement.

This model assumes that the three missions are carried out in an interrelated way and combined to meet expectations, without taking into account the differences between higher education systems in different countries and even between institutions within the same education system (Philpott et al., 2011).

We will briefly outline our work methodology, introduce a literature review on the Third Mission, and scrutinise the key characteristics of the higher education systems of the three European countries.

Methodology

As stated in the introduction, we are interested in reconstructing the emergence of the Third Mission of university in France, Spain and Italy. We choose these three countries because their HE traditions and organisational cultures fall under the Napoleonic model of university. The ideal-typical description purports that higher education is under the control of the State who organises and manages it in a centralistic fashion throughout the national territory; academics are considered as part of the hierarchy of the civil service (thus freedom of thought and research are limited). State legal diplomas and generally formal credentials are the main goods the system administers to its users as those are the key for access both to the higher ranks of bureaucracy and to the most prestigious professions (law, medicine, engineering) within civil society (this is why in this model the education mission *largely* prevails over research) (Rüegg, 2004).[1]

We believe that, historically, the practices commonly considered as pertaining to the Third Mission of the university are essentially a development within the anglo-saxon model: typically, US *Land Grant* universities (OECD, 1999) and UK Civic, *Red-bric*k universities (Moore, 2019). Moreover, as we consider that the very adoption of the expression 'Third Mission' in the debate over HE organisation and policies dates back less than three decades, we can clearly recognize its early uses to lie within and refer to anglo-saxon HE systems.

Thus, our main research question is: how has a product of the anglo-saxon university environment spread towards systems with a different organisational tradition and culture?

We certainly don't mean to deny the growing homogeneity among western HE systems, strongly sustained by the policies of both national and supranational political entities (such the Bologna process steered by the EU), and by social and economic developments of progressive integration among Western, and particularly European, countries. National HE systems are growingly similar inasmuch they face the same challenges and compete within the same social and economic environment (that does not mean that they're growingly equal, as they get unequal results – they are winners or losers – in those challenges and competitions).

On the contrary, we wish to be able to describe and assess in detail the assumption of the Third Mission within our three 'Latin' university systems precisely as an episode of this process of homogenization; i.e. we assume the ongoing relevance of (though fading) cultural-organisational differences in order to finely describe a specific case of their overcoming.

[1] This model is commonly contrasted with two other ideal-types of university system; the German/Humboldtian and the Anglo-Saxon.

A secondary research question, but preliminary to our main one, is the following: what is the prevalent meaning of 'Third Mission' in its earliest uses? That is because we would like, assuming the common judgement of Third Mission as a multidimensional concept, to ascertain whether one of these dimensions prevails and, in case, which one, in order to better specify an early core of the notion, as it is well known that the growing diffusion of the use of a term/expression implies a drift towards its semantic complexity as well as vagueness. This has nothing to do with establishing an epistemic priority for that early eventual connotation; it only serves to clarify the locutory and illocutory roles it contingently played at its actual outset, in order to better understand the dynamics of its progressive establishment (and change) as an accepted and relevant label for institutionally sanctioned practices. In other words, we will try to submit the notion of Third Mission to an elementary application of the genealogical approach (cf. Foucault, 1971). Having thus at our best specified our research curiosities, we have now to describe the method through which we have tried to satisfy them.

Ours is a documentary desk research, based on three main types of *corpus* of documents and texts we have collected and scrutinised:

1. Laws and regulations on national higher education systems, respectively for France, Spain and Italy;
2. Grey Literature (Reports published by international organisations like OECD, Unesco, the European commission or by organisations like the Russell Group of UK Universities) on higher education;
3. Academic literature (monographies, edited volumes and papers on academic journals) on higher education, including a broad range of social science disciplines and subdisciplines, from sociology of education to the theory of organisations and management, to economics.

In the following section, we will analyse parts of the 2nd and 3rd *corpora* in order to specify an updated and maximally consensual definition of 'Third Mission'; we will then, on the basis of the ordering by year of publication of the documents our 2nd and 3rd *corpora*, retrieve and analyse the early uses of the notion of 'Third Mission' – taking also into consideration the references and citations they could make to even earlier definitions or uses of the notion – trying to establish its early connotation and illustrate it through some examples (this being an elementary exercise in genealogical discourse analysis, cf. Dunn & Neumann, 2016).

In section 4 we will describe, in detail, analyzing documents from all three *corpora*, the process of regulatory and administrative interventions that implied the adoption of Third Mission practices as institutional activities of the French, Spanish and Italian HE systems.

In the concluding section, we will present some comparative considerations on our three cases as well as some conclusions about our overall in-

terpretation on the way Third Mission came to be a part of the university landscape in France, Spain and Italy.

Literature review

The Third Mission consists in the university's "relationship with the non-academic outside world: industry, public authorities and society" (Schoen et al. 2007, p.127). It involves collaboration "between higher education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources" (Driscoll, 2008, p.39) for the benefit of the economy and society (Molas-Gallart et al., 2002).

> Conceptually, the Third Mission reflects the broader role taken on by universities over the last *few decades*. It, therefore, seems logical, and necessary from an institutional point of view, to include the *new tasks* that universities must carry out when *evaluating their productivity* and *efficiency*, a fact that can lead to a better understanding of the differences in their performance (De La Torre, Agasisti & Esparrels, 2017, pp.3-4).

According to Rothaermel, Agung & Jiang (2007) and also Secundo et al. (2017), Third Mission practices are also related to the activities and assets that refer to an 'entrepreneurial university', such as technology transfer, university licensing, science parks, business incubators and university spin-offs. All these activities are required or produced by universities, "beyond students trained and publications made: revenues from contracts, numbers of patents granted and number of spin-off firms are now standard elements found in most university reports or websites" (Laredo, 2007, p.446).

The Third Mission is generally defined rather vaguely. The E3M project (European Indicators and Ranking Methodology for University Third Mission) suggests that activities related to this concept comprise three dimensions summarised as follows (E3M, 2008, pp.8-9):

1. *echnology Transfer and Innovation* (TTI). It can be defined as the transfer of an idea, a technical knowledge, an intellectual property, a discovery or an invention resulting from university research (with or without external partners) to a non-university environment. These transfers can lead to social and economic benefits at local, regional, national or global level.
2. *Continuing education.* This expression refers to all learning activities undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective (European Commission, 2001);
3. *Social Engagement.* It is a partnership between the university and the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research and creative

activity; enhance curricula, teaching and learning; prepare engaged citizens; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good (Committee on Institutional Cooperation, 2005).

Thus, the notion of Third Mission emerges from a value-prescriptive (and a mission is obviously a strongly value-oriented objective), combining a private, self-interested notion with other dimensions often associated with. Sometimes it directly expresses and advocates selfless collective commitment to public (as opposed to private) interest. Thus, it should come to no one's surprise that the notion would entail tensions and difficulties of operative specification, as widely recognized in the literature on the subject (most explicitly in Molas-Gallart & Castro-Martínez, 2007).

Taking now into consideration the early uses of the notion we have found in grey and scholarly literature *corpora*, in our recognition we have found and analyzed 20 documents. 13 of them adopt an economic, entrepreneurial intension of 'Third Mission'[2]; 4 have a multidimensional connotation[3]; 1 a social connotation, such 'no profit' one[4]; 2 present an unclear notion[5], mostly because they tend to use the expression as taken for granted and/or use the expression too rarely.

Among the examples of the modal, economic notion we firstly cite Judith Sutz who, though using the expression 'third role' of the university instead of 'Third Mission', uses it in a structurally equivalent sense inasmuch as the first two 'roles' are equivalent to the first two traditional university 'missions' (i.e. 'teaching and researching'). Specifically, Sutz says:

> What is really new in the third role of the university is the partial elimination of mediation between the results produced and their final users. In the old times, the university as such – with very few exceptions – did not carry out the functions that are characteristic of the enterprise: it did not market its capacities, it did not enter into agreements specifying the article to be delivered or the delivery date, it did not compete with either university or non-university agents to sell its intellectual production (Sutz, 1997, p. 2).

Etzkowitz synthetically delineate their notion "the entrepreneurial university encompasses a 'third-mission' of economic development in addition to research and teaching, though the precise shape this takes might vary

[2] Sutz (1997); Etzkowitz et al. (2000); Clark (2001); Klein (2002); Molas-Gallart (2002); Vakkuri (2004); Bonaccorsi & Daraio (2008); Minshall, Druilhe & Probert (2006); Jones (2007); Woollard, Zhang & Jones (2007); Guenther & Wagner (2008); Van der Steen & Enders (2008); Serarols i Tarrés (2024).

[3] OECD (1998); Laredo (2007); Montesinos et al. (2008), Campos & Casani (2007).

[4] OECD (1999).

[5] Ahola (2005); Jongbloed Enders & Salerno (2008).

such that different scenarios of academic development can be projected" (Etzkowitz et al., 2000, p. 313).

Another influential author as Burton Clark (2001), specifying his model of the entrepreneurial university moves from talking about a third-stream of university funding (i.e. different from government –1st– and public research council sources –2nd– as it derives from: public authorities without an institutional task of funding the university, the private sector or university generated income) to talking of third-stream activities.

In another influential document, the report produced by a group of experts of the Science and Technology Policy Research Unit (SPRU) at the University of Sussex (directed by Jordi Molas-Gallart) and addressed to the Russell group, the organization that represents the top-ranking universities in UK, we find another case of an economic interpretation of 'Third Mission':

> What is the university 'Third Stream'? Universities have been founded principally on two sets of activities: teaching and research. However, universities have always made contributions, both directly and indirectly, to decision-making in the wider society; this is their 'Third Mission'. Third stream activities are therefore concerned with the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments (…). Many governments around the world now feel that the role of universities in the emerging knowledge economy is of growing significance. This emphasis on the value of universities to economic performance is reflected in many policy and academic debates, focusing on university commercial activities (Molas-Gallart et al., 2002, para 3).

Minshall, Druilhe & Probert (2006) arrive to the extreme of equating 'Third Mission' with 'commercial application':

> This paper discusses the balancing of strategic and operational issues for the management of 'Third Mission' (i.e., commercial application) (…) 'Third Mission' is a term now commonly used in the U.K. to cover activities that represent an application of knowledge developed within universities, complementing the core activities of teaching and research. In many cases such activities are essentially viewed as encompassing the licensing of the outputs of research projects, and the formation of spin-out businesses. However, a much broader view can also be taken of that includes activities such as consulting by individual academics, student placements, coordinated provision of commercial problem solving services, industrial secondments, and many more. For a range of reasons, both universities and public funders of universities have in recent years become increasingly eager to see all such activities flourish (*ivi, p.* 7).

The first use of 'Third Mission' we found in our grey literature *corpus*[6] is in OECD (1998); in this document a multidimensional notion of 'Third Mission', analogue to the one we have exposed at the beginning of this section:

> To the long-standing tandem of teaching and research, many universities have added a Third Mission: service to the community. In our increasingly knowledge-intensive societies, this mission focuses attention on universities as centres for lifelong education (and further professional studies), as well as centres for scientific services in the form of technology transfer to the business sector in the pursuit of national economic advantage. In a number of countries, universities are seen as important elements in regional development strategies (*ivi*, p.26).

As only example of a mainly social, 'no profit' notion we consider OECD (1999):

> The contributions that HEIs have always made to civil society through the extramural activities of individual staff (i.e., in the media, politics, the arts, advising government bodies, socio-economic and technological analyses) and through providing liberal adult education and evening classes and access to facilities like libraries, theatres, museums and public lectures are being bundled together and recognised as a "third role" alongside teaching and research (*ivi,* p.93).

Hence, we consider the emergence of the notion of Third Mission as characterised by a mainly economic focus (a market oriented approach), underlying institutional activities that started taking place in the last fifteen years of XX century. Comparatively, non-commercial activities such as: service learning, community based training… – in other terms, Public Engagement (PE) – seem to be less considered. Activities of *Technology transfer and innovation* like spin-offs, consultings, patents, were at the forefront of the attention. Another part of the literature on university-industry relations emphasises the role of the university in *regional innovation* systems as a primary driver of *economic development* (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2006; Guan & Zhao, 2013; Cesaroni & Piccalunga, 2016; Secundo et al., 2017).

[6] As the constitution of our 3rd *corpus* was aided by a query (about the occurrence in a recorded publication of at least one of the expressions 'Third Mission', 'Troisième Mission', 'Tercera Misión' e 'Terza Missione' into the record Title, Abstract or Keywords on two well known scientific publication data-bases, as *Scopus* and *Web of Science*. It is useful to report the fact that the first publication actually referring to the university (as opposed, for example, to some Third Mission of an artificial satellite or of a charitable organization) goes back to 2004 in *Scopus* and to 2006 on the *Web of Science*. Hence, previous documents entered in our *corpora* are the result of the authors' electronically unaided bibliographical searches. We also decided to establish the year 2009 as *terminus ad quem* for documents to be considered early uses of the notion, mostly because on march 2009 an issue of the Journal *Science and Public Policy* was devoted to an evaluation of the notion of Third Mission (Göransson, Maharajh & Schmoch, 2009).

Conclusions similar to ours also seem to be reached by Venditti (Venditti et al., 2013) where they note:

> In recent decades, the emphasis on knowledge-based innovations has featured the economic function of the university as focal among the Third Missions. The 'Third Mission', for example, was mainly implemented in terms of technology transfer offices, intellectual property, valorization programs, university-industry-government relations (*ivi*, p. 792).

The Third Mission within the "Napoleonic" mode of governance

The French shift to an "entrepreneurial mode" of governance

In the French HE system, tasks and functions increased considerably over the last few decades (Fave-Bonnet, 2002, pp.32-33). Tracing the main reforms that took place within the last decades, the *Savary Law* of 26 January 1984 included some elements that can be identified with the Third Mission, but that are not still named as such. This law goes along the same lines of the *Loi d'orientation sur l'enseignement supérieur* of 12 November 1968 (known as the Edgar Faure Law) leading to a significant increase in the number of tasks addressed to universities, especially in the following areas: management training, social and economic development of the regions, teacher training, social and professional development. Around the 1980s also The Research Act (*Loi d'Orientation et de Programmation*) was promulgated. It established some policy objectives on science such as the 'commercial valorization and diffusion of public laboratories' and research results' (art. 14, Public Law 82–610; see: Loi 1982). The same guidelines were extended to universities two years later (Public Law 84–52; cf. Loi 1984, named Savary Law). The Savary Law (1984) recites:

> The missions of the public higher education service are initial and continuing training, scientific and technological research and the *exploitation of its results*, the *dissemination of culture and scientific and technical information*, and international cooperation" (Fave-Bonnet, 2002, p.32).

Hence, the two dimensions: 'exploitation of academic results' and 'dissemination of culture and scientific and technical information', seem to take into account tasks defined later by E3M (2008) as 'Third Mission'.

In 1999 *the Innovation Act* went in the same direction. It concerned, among others, the 'technology transfer and innovation' (TTI) field involving "a more aggressive patenting activity by universities" (Della Malva et al., 2013, p. 212).

> This Legislation was profoundly influenced by an earlier ministerial report (the Guillaume report in 1998), which stressed that a number of barriers hampered the flow of knowledge between public research and industry, among them a far too limited use of IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) instruments by universities. […] First, the Innovation Act added explicitly the commercial exploitation of patents and licences to the universities' mission, on the same footing as teaching and research (art. 1, IV, comma for PROs and art. 2, IV, comma for universities, in: Loi 1999) (Della Malva et al., 2013, p. 217- 218).

In this sense, it is possible to claim that the *Innovation Act* more than the Savary Law outlined the Third Mission's concept. The Third Mission's concept was born in France in 1999, when patent exploitation and licensing were added to the previous missions of teaching and research.

The *Innovation Act* also introduced:

> [The *Innovation Act* also introduced] the possibility for both universities and PROs (Public Research Organizations) to create internal TTOs [Technology Transfer Offices] (called SAICs: *Services d'Activités Industrielles et Commerciales*), to staff them with external personnel, and to run them according to 'business-like budgetary and accounting rules' (art. 2, I, comma for universities, in: Loi 1999) (Della Malva et al., 2013, p. 218).

It is therefore interesting to note that the *Innovation Act* is one of many initiatives undertaken in France, over the years, to promote greater autonomy for universities and less dependence on PROs as the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) and the INSERM (Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale).[7] A series of reforms that took place in 2000 also went in the same direction.[8] After this reformist trend, the French model seems to comprise three main missions (1- education; 2- research; 3- technology transfer, continuing education, social/public engagement). The three missions are managed with many difficulties by university professors more than by researchers into the PROs, such as CNRS or INSERM, who are mainly devoted to research activities.

In a narrower sense, it seems that from 1999 onwards, public universities faced several difficulties in managing the three missions. The increase in the number of students due to the massification of higher education after the 1960s and the increase in technological competition didn't make it easier for universities to manage the three missions (Fave-Bonnet, 2002). The change

[7] Public research organisations (PROs) include all the institutions known in France as the Établissements Public à Caractère Scientifique et Technique (EPST) such as CNRS or INSERM or Établissements Public à Caractère Industriel et Commercial (EPIC) (Della Malva et al. 2013).

[8] For a more detailed reconstruction cf. Tandilashvili, 2022.

in the system of attribution of academic titles also demonstrates how the professor role changed during the last decades. In this regard, before 1968, the word 'professor' (professeur) was used, and after 1968 the word 'teacher-researchers' (enseignants-chercheurs) was used (Fave-Bonnet, 2022). The differentiation of tasks, associated with the three missions activities, changed the relationships of academics with time and financial resources, especially in public universities.

Thus, it involved professors in managerial and funding responsibilities. The increasing number of activities addressed to universities made it difficult to achieve quantity and quality as well in research and in didactics. As shown in the Fréville Report (2001), an investigation conducted by the Finance Committee of the French Senate on academic working satisfaction, academics were not satisfied about how their activities were evaluated. On one hand, French academics were not evaluated on the quality or efficiency of teaching and administrative tasks and only few bonuses were awarded for their completion. On the other hand, the individual evaluation of the academic staff of the universities was mainly assigned, in 2001, to the CNU (Conseil national des universités) and it concerned more 'researchers' than 'teacher-researchers', assessing exclusively research (publications and products of research, patents).

Finally, this kind of assessment, based solely on the number of publications in internationally indexed peer-reviewed journals, placed French academics in an unsustainable position in global competition. All these elements led to frustration among academics at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2009, the *Programme d'Investissement d'Avenir* (PIA) was launched:

> With the aim to create world-class university complexes capable of strengthening France's international competitiveness. Unintendently, this reform also restructured the competitive environment of national higher education (Chatelin & Kaddouri, 2017) and reinforced the *result-oriented* culture with *performance-based budgeting* practices (Tandilashvili, 2022, para 16).

The effect of this reform was to strengthen the position of academics and make them less vulnerable to publication competition. The latest reform is the 2020 law on research programming for the 2021-2030 horizon. Among others, the law aims to 'increase the influence' of French research in the world.

It also aims to enhance the job status and career in research and higher education by introducing new indicators, based on financial needs and budgetary resources (Tandilashvili, 2022). Tandilashvili conducted qualitative research on academics who work in three different academic public contexts and documented their reactions to recent reforms. Firstly, universities sought to diversify their sources of funding in a difficult financial context.

The involvement of university leaders in seeking additional sources of funding jeopardised accepted and shared practices among academics. The second change perceived by the interviewees that confirms the prevailing feeling on this topic is that research became more important than teaching.

In 2007 the PRES reform took place (*Pôles de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur*) which drastically increased this feeling, as it was designed to improve the position of French universities in international rankings. This reform invited public universities to merge. As a consequence, there was a *pressure* on academics to increase their scientific production and to work in a project mode. In general, interviewees attribute the deterioration in working conditions and the decline in the quality of scientific work to the pressure to publish. Constantly evaluated and asked to justify their productivity, French academics no longer feel free in their profession, even though they consider freedom to be a necessary condition for 'fulfilling the missions of higher education'. The fourth change affecting the way universities work is the increase in administrative tasks. As a result of project-based research as well as the constant evaluations and the introduction of new management tools, the academics interviewed claim that they 'spend their time filling in paperwork for *local and external bodies*'.

Hence, the scenario did not change between 2001 (Fréville report, 2001) and the research carried out by Tandilashvili in 2022. The high pressure to publish and to find different sources of funding as well as the increasing administrative tasks (fundraising related activities) made researchers in public universities progressively and increasingly dissatisfied with their working conditions.

In the legislative texts from 1999 to 2014, relating to the 'research code' and the organisation of research and technological development, there is not an explicit reference to the Third Mission term. More specifically, these texts used the notion of 'research missions' as an extension of the second mission.

The Third Mission term first appeared in the literature in 2006 (Tapie, 2006). However, it is not used in any normative document regarding the HE system. More specifically, the text focused on the transfer of 'research-trained skills' to graduate and doctoral students for use in industry and public services, and on the efforts of academics to train these students. In the same year, "a study carried out in Angers, a medium-sized French city, highlighted the crucial role of professional master's degrees as an indirect generator of economic activity through non-resident students" (Technopolis, 2006 cit. in Lareto, 2007, p.451).

Finally, regarding the French case, Technological Transfer (TT) was a key process in the emergence of the concept of the Third Mission in 1999 (Innovation Act)(Della Malva et al. 2013). Instead, the scientific training of human

resources was a relevant aspect in the emergence of the concept of the Third Mission.

The literature mentioned highlights that public universities, more than other institutions involved in scientific research, faced several difficulties in managing the increased number of tasks related to the Third Mission (such as administrative tasks or scientific training of graduates and Ph.D. students).

Laws and Reforms: Emerging Trends in the Third Mission of Spanish Universities

The aim of this paragraph is to elucidate the modifications that the Spanish higher education system has undergone concerning the definition and implementation of the Third Mission. To this end, a longitudinal analysis of university laws since the 1980s will be conducted, complemented by an examination of additional regulations, reports, and other pertinent materials.

The initial steps taken by Spanish universities to embrace their Third Mission can be traced back to the post-Franco Organic Law of 1983, which sought to promote the modernization and de-bureaucratization of higher education in Spain (Neave, 2009; Marini, 2018). According to the Organic Law of 1983:

> Spain's incorporation into advanced industrial societies necessarily requires its full incorporation into the world of modern science, from which it has been separated almost from the beginning by various historical vicissitudes […] the social institution best prepared today to take on this challenge of scientific-technical development is the University.

The law also clarifies that it was derived from two contingencies: the increasing number of students and the desire to belong to a European university system, which would result in greater mobility for students and professors, improved curricula, and the creation of flexible degree programs relevant to the labor market.

These excerpts highlight the role of universities in addressing the needs of an evolving industrial society. While the reference to the relationship between universities and the industrial sector is limited, it underscores the pivotal role industrialization plays in driving the development of the Spanish higher education system. Furthermore, the emphasis on creating flexible degree programs illustrates an early recognition of the importance of aligning academic offerings with labor market demands. This alignment is a crucial aspect of the university's trajectory towards becoming an 'entrepreneurial university' (Secundo et al., 2017).

The Organic Law of 1983 also initiated a process of dual national and regional development (De Miguel, Escudero & Rodriguez, 1989, p.20): "the Spanish Constitution (has) revised the traditional centralist administrative

legal regime of the Spanish University, by recognising the autonomy of the Universities" (Organic Law 11/1983). Consequently, this shift marked the beginning of a necessary engagement with the market and other stakeholders within the field.

The Science, Technology, and Innovation Law (Law No. 13/1986) established essential instruments to identify priority areas of action for scientific research and technological development. It aimed to effectively plan and coordinate resources across various sectors and align the actions of productive sectors, research centres, and universities. The fifth article of this law states:

> The National Plan shall, in any case, promote: a) the necessary communication between public and private research centres and companies; b) the inclusion in research projects and programmes of provisions relating to the use of the results of the research; c) joint actions by universities and public research centres with companies.

Additionally, the tenth article specifies:

> For promoting the establishment of new technologies and without prejudice to the powers legally vested in it, the Centre for the Technological and Industrial Development shall, in relation to the National Plan, exercise the following functions: a) evaluate the technological and economic-financial content of the projects in which companies are involved; b) contract with the universities, public research bodies, and companies for the promotion of the commercial exploitation of the technologies developed by them.

Molas-Gallart & Castro-Martinez (2007) note that the National R&D Plan established in 1988, resulting from the Science, Technology, and Innovation Law, aimed to facilitate Knowledge Transfer between public universities and industry. This exchange necessitated the establishment of centres on university campuses, known as OTRIs (Offices for the Transfer of Research Results), thereby introducing a system for evaluating the accomplishments related to the Third Mission through annual indicators. These indicators assess key metrics such as R&D contracts (quantity, type, value, client category), patent applications, licensing agreements, and other R&D initiatives, as well as the staffing of OTRIs (Molas-Gallart & Castro-Martinez, 2007).

Molas-Gallart and Castro-Martinez articulate two overarching goals of this approach:

> First, to develop an efficient approach to data-gathering and management that could supply the data needs of public agencies and provide comparable data while reducing the substantial effort that was being invested in answering the proliferating requests for data. Second, it aimed to provide a reliable tool for benchmarking and self-assessment of the OTRI Network members" (Molas-Gallart & Castro-Martinez, 2007, p. 326).

By measuring OTRI's participation in these activities, two primary objectives can be achieved: enhancing the synergy between universities and industry and quantitatively assessing the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at fulfilling the Third Mission. This trajectory underscores the evolution of Spanish universities toward becoming entrepreneurial institutions that actively engage with and respond to societal and economic demands, thereby solidifying their role as key players in the innovation ecosystem.

In 2002, Molas-Gallart contributed to the report titled *Measuring Third Stream Activities: Final Report to the Russell Group of Universities*, in which he began to utilize the terms 'Third Stream' and 'Third Mission'. It is essential to understand that these concepts primarily refer to a commitment to knowledge and technology transfer, positioning such transfer as both the origin and focal point of emerging processes associated in academic literature with the Third Mission.

In 2001, the new Organic Law (LOU) reinforced the university's commitment to society and its link to the labor market. Article 32 established the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA).

Article 41 states that:

> The link between university research and the production system is to articulate knowledge transfer as well as the university's presence within the innovation processes of the production system and companies. This linkage, where appropriate, may be carried out through the creation of technology-based companies based on university activity in which teaching and research staff may participate.

Therefore, the Organic Law presents the university and its commitment to society as a response to societal needs. Hence, it emphasizes the role of Knowledge Transfer (KT) in strengthening the link between university research and the production system.

Also in 2001, Third Mission activities became a legal obligation for five Spanish universities, including the dissemination of knowledge and culture through university outreach and lifelong learning (De La Torre, Agasisti, & Pérez-Esparrels, 2017). It is important to note that "nonetheless, the available indicators are still balanced towards KT" (*ivi*, p. 211) as the authors denounce a lack of available data on the other constitutive elements of the Third Mission.

According to Vidal (Vidal, 2013; Vidal & Vieira, 2014), the 2001 Law was poorly received by the academic community, which immediately demanded changes. Major issues were related to the election of the rector and the level of representation. This situation led to the Ley Orgánica 4/2007, known as LUOLOM, which addressed these issues and established that Spanish universities, both public and private (Alfageme, Gonzalez & Caballero, 2010), should provide a service to society that includes "dissemination, valoriza-

tion, and knowledge transfer at the service of culture, quality of life, and economic development" (De La Torre, Agasisti & Pérez-Esparrels, 2017, p. 214).

In particular, the LOU includes knowledge transfer, lifelong learning, and social engagement duties. However, the LOU and LOMLOU only recognize 'academic's' right to the evaluation and recognition of their technology and knowledge transfer activity for the assessment of their professional activity (Article 41.3), "which corresponds to one out of three dimensions of the Third Mission" (De La Torre, Pérez-Esparrels, & Casani, 2018, p. 15).

In the recent *Ley Orgánica* (2/2023) (LOSU), the constitutive elements of the Third Mission can be identified in terms of knowledge transfer and social engagement, and to a lesser extent in terms of lifelong education; however, there is no specific use of the spanish expression corresponding to 'Third Mission'. A specific chapter (N. VI) of the Organic Law is dedicated to 'Universidad, Sociedad y Cultura':

> Universities shall promote equitable, inclusive, and sustainable economic and social development that may favour the creation of quality employment and improve welfare standards in the territories where they are located. They shall strengthen collaboration with local administrations and social actors in their environment, promoting citizen science and service-learning projects.

Concerning the evaluation of the Third Mission's academic commitment, the ANECA agency until 2016 residually included KT criteria among those evaluating research experience, which is the criterion with the highest weight assigned (De La Torre, Pérez-Esparrels, & Casani, 2018). Here, "KT professional work experience, university management, and educational background are considered compensatory merits in cases of C marks in teaching and research" (De La Torre, Pérez-Esparrels, & Casani, 2018, p. 15). In the latest ANECA 2024 guidelines, the evaluation criteria explicitly include 'transfer and exchange of knowledge and professional activity', which is assigned a score ranging from 0 to a maximum of 20 points out of a total of 100 points within the macro session called 'Research, Knowledge Transfer and Exchange'. This framework also includes a general category for 'Scientific Dissemination' which receives a score of 0 to 10 points out of 100 points. Furthermore, within the teaching session, 'Activities for lifelong learning' are indicated, with a maximum allocation of 5 points out of 100 points attributable to the session.

Although laws since 2001 have made references to technology and knowledge transfer, as well as lifelong education, and to a lesser extent have indirectly addressed social engagement, they never consider the Third Mission in an integrated manner and, as in France, do not use the term 'Third Mission'.

The laws briefly examined above reveal noteworthy trends in the management of Spanish universities since 1983. These trends reflect a nascent effort to reconcile the academic mission with social and economic well-being, characterized by a market-oriented approach.

Despite the fact that ANECA evaluations do not currently recognize a significant impact from the activities associated with the Third Mission, the laws and reforms undertaken indicate a transition process toward a university governance model that seeks to be more market-oriented. This process produces two effects for higher education institutions. First, the transfer of knowledge and technology through the Third Mission generates economic value. Second, universities, similar to companies, engage in social responsibility activities to maintain and enhance their reputation and brand.

As we have seen, the reflection on the university's Third Mission is of extreme relevance especially for understanding the general orientation and priorities of university systems; however, we can conclude that within the Spanish university system it is primarily a concept grounded in technology and knowledge transfer and on the economic valorisation of knowledge, which, we noticed, is progressively expanding to encompass social values.

Furthermore, discrepancies are apparent in the temporal and conceptual alignment among the content of laws and regulations, academic literature, reporting and evaluation systems, and the central focus of our research. Although the earliest documented attempt to regulate and encompass technology and knowledge transfer practices occurred as early as 1988, grey literature on the Third Mission began to take shape by 2002, facilitated by the involvement of Spanish authors in the Russell Report (Molas-Gallart et al., 2002). This development included a tendency to overlap the term 'Third Mission' with that of technology transfer. Since the mid-2000s, references to the Third Mission have become increasingly frequent in academic literature, likely spurred by the need to align with the evolving international definitions of the concept (Molas-Gallart, 2005; Laredo, 2007). Despite this academic traction, the term 'Third Mission' is never employed in legislative texts. A limited number of reports and conference papers (Campos & Casani, 2007) investigate the potential for assessing the Third Mission; however, ANECA has yet to develop any 'synthetic' indicators to evaluate Third Mission performance—both in terms of individual activities and of institutional commitment—nor does it utilize the specific term within its framework.

Third Mission in the Italian's (rather recent) transition to a NPM inspired governance system of "institutional meritocracy"

In order to consider the origin, development and impact of the notion of Third Mission within the Italian HE system, it may be useful to outline some broad characteristics of this system. The university system is composed of

68 state universities and 20 state-recognised universities; 11 state-recognised online universities (telematic universities). Since 1989, universities have enjoyed autonomy within a regulatory framework defined by the Ministry of University and Research (whose current acronym is MUR). Autonomy[9] gives each university statutory powers: the ability to self-define its own organisational principles and structures; to manage its own finances, to pursue its own strategies, to teach and award degrees, to organise its own research activities and even to engage in the Third Mission.

> [Within this framework] The share of 25-34 year-old Italians holding a tertiary degree is still much lower than in most OECD countries, notwithstanding recent improvements. For all levels of education, expenditure per student is below the OECD average and the gap increases along with the educational level. Italy's expenditure on tertiary education is about 30% lower than the OECD average (OECD, 2019, p.26).

Hence, chronic underfunding and underproduction of graduates (both in terms of portions of the general population in possession of a HE degree and of shares of drop-outs, students that leave the university without having obtained a degree) are the main weaknesses of the Italian HE system. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, in Italy these chronic problems, and university policy issues more generally, were addressed by drawing increasingly on the principles and logic of New Public Management (NPM), an approach to the management of public services that originated in the United States, the United Kingdom and other British Commonwealth countries such as New Zealand.

> In recent decades, many countries with high-participation higher education systems, including Italy, have increasingly sought to manage their universities and other public-sector institutions in accordance with the principles of New Public Management (NPM) […]. Proponents of the NPM approach argue that private-sector management practices are required in order to *maximise* the *efficiency* and *quality* of public-sector institutions. With basic mottos such as 'more market, less regulation, and strong leadership', the NPM approach sets out to create 'quasi-markets' in public service provision (Mateos-González & Boliver, 2019, p.145).

But the full swing (with a typical Italian bureaucratic twist, see the end of this section) of NPM inspired university policies is somewhat more recent, starting in 2010 with the Law N.240 of that year (known as Gelmini Reform from the name of the then Minister), that put in place a general

[9] The L.9.5.1989, N.168. leads to organisational autonomy; L.24.12.1993, n.537 to financial autonomy; n. 537. L.15.5.1997, n.127, as well as subsequent adjustments (L.14.1.1999, n.4; L.19.10.1999, n.370); D.M.3.11.1999, n.509, provided didactic autonomy.

reorganisation of the Italian HE system: it abolished faculties in favour of departments; transformed the entry level academic position (the 'junior researcher' employed under open-ended contracts was abolished and substituted with fixed-term roles); established a new recruitment and career system for academics, the National Scientific Qualification (ASN, Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale).

More importantly for our concerns, it established national procedures for the evaluation of university activities by founding the National Agency for the Evaluation of the Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR, Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione dell'Università e della Ricerca)[10] and putting it in charge of the design and implementation of a span of *ex ante, in itinere and ex post* evaluations of the HE system alongside with addresses and prescriptions, mainly oriented to a hierarchical ranking goal, that is to assess and order qualitative level of performance in order to reward the better performing units (Universities, Departments, Research centres, but also individual personnel units), thereby instituting a competition among them.

ANVUR is a quasi-autonomous agency whose members are nominated by the Minister, that operates as a technical, advisory staff for the political and administrative management of Italian HEI. These kinds of agencies are a typical expression of NPM policies (Cingolani & Fazekas, 2020). In fact, ANVUR is central in the most strategic decisions regarding the activities of the italian universities: from the allocation of public funds to the accreditation of Higher Education institutions and study programmes; from the formulations of productivity standards for academic recruitment and career, to those allowing single academics to take part to selection commissions or to Ph.D. programs or scientific boards.

Thus, ANVUR's protocols and practices of performance measurement and management profoundly changed the nature and dynamics of the Italian HE governance along the lines of an Institutional meritocracy (Mateos-González & Boliver, 2019), characterised by strong internal competitions among actors within the system whose results put them in a hierarchical order of 'excellence'.

> Hence, it it possible to state that the NPM paradigm in Italian HE seems to pursue the following rationales: 1) managerialism, quasi-market, and competition rather than planning as the main coordination mechanism for increasing HE *efficiency*; 2) the redistribution of authority among different governance levels and strengthening of institutional autonomy by devolving decision making power from the state to universities' internal leadership bodies, with professors gaining access to these bodies via competitive drivers; and 3) modifying the funding model by shifting the financial burden from the public to

[10] D.P.R. 76/2010, a regulation stemmed from L. 240/2010. Cf. also D.lgs. 19/2012.

> private purse and adopting output-based mechanisms in which the distribution of public funds depends on performance measurement (Colombo & Salmieri, 2022, p.295).

In this situation, what lies in stark contrast with the NPM doctrine is the fact that ANVUR encumbers the 'autonomous' governance of the italian universities with a plethora of prescriptions and addresses, often stated in deep detail, thus assuming a posture which is more expressive of a traditional bureaucratic vertical authority towards a subordinate executive than of the horizontal authority of an advisory staff towards an autonomous management. Gianfranco Viesti (2018) brilliantly illustrates this situation by citing an extract from one of the many guidelines that ANVUR prepares for the Ministry to be sent to all Italian universities, which are expected to comply; it is about the qualification criteria for eligibility into a Ph.D. program board:

> The requirement regarding the qualification for the Ph.D. board membership is met if at least 3 of the following conditions are jointly verified. 1): R>=1, X>=0.9, R+X >=2, with normalization at the level of scientific-disciplinary field; 2) I>=0.8, I is obtained by averaging over the professors and researchers who are members of the full college the following indicator A=0, 0.4, 0.8, 1.2 if the relevant member of the college, full professor or associate professor or researcher, meets 0, 1, 2 or 3 of the thresholds for Commissioners for the selection of full professors, full professors commissioners for the selection of associate professors, and professors of associate professors commisioners for the selection of researchers, respectively; 3) in bibliometric fields, in the last five years a number of products published in scientific journals contained in the Scopus and Web of Science databases at least equal to the threshold set for associate professors in their own competition area; in non-bibliometric fields, in the last ten years a number of articles in class A journals at least equal to the threshold set for associate professors in their own competition area; 4) meet at least one of the following conditions (a, b): (a) possess at least two of the threshold values set for Commissar at ASN, (b) meet at least two of the following conditions: i) participation in A/ISI/Scopus journal steering or editorial boards; ii) experience as a central coordinator or research group unit and/or national or international competitive projects in the last 10 years; iii) for bibliometric fields, the coordinator's 15-year H index must be equal to or greater than the ASN threshold for the role of Commissar in the concurrent field (or SSD) to which he/she belongs. For non-bibliometric fields, the number of papers published in Class A journals in the last 15 years must be equal to or greater than the threshold for Commissioners in the relevant Disciplinary Sector (or SSD) of the last ASN. These thresholds apply regardless of whether the Coordinator has full or associate professor status" (Viesti 2018, p.98, *translated by the authors*).

Note that these mysterious numerals implicitly refer to quantitative benchmarks and thresholds (in this case, those prescribed to be part of various academic selection commissions) based on the number of publications (*research products*) owned by candidates. And considering the documentation requirements and forms ANVUR requests for accreditation and quality assessment purposes from universities, Viesti adds: "Compiling the documentation prepared by the agency is an exercise capable of committing substantial resources of universities for months among both technical and teaching staff" (Viesti, 2018, p.100, *translated by the authors*).

The emergence of the notion of Third Mission in Italy as an ANVUR evaluation tool

Until recently, in Italy the Third Mission wasn't sufficiently acknowledged. Luzzatto (2010) states that the Italian university system lacks an explication of Third Mission as a systematic commitment, constitutive of the identity of a university institution within the knowledge society.

Even more recently, Pedrazzi (2012, S19) adds: "The Third Mission should not be viewed as subordinate but complementary to the other two. Not accidentally, in some of the most advanced countries this role was recognized as institutional while in Italy the problem is still essentially ignored" .

In fact, any reference to a concept which approximates that of 'Third Mission' is absent from Italian main laws regulating HEI from the Ruberti reform (1989) till the Gelmini one and *a fortiori* in previous legislation. First normative references are to be found in single universities' autonomous statutes and regulations (Luzzatto, 2010). The first mention with a nationwide relevance of something as a third mission is found, characteristically, within the founding regulation of Anvur: its tasks include assessing 'the quality of the processes, results and products of management, training and research activities [*including technology transfer]*' (Article 3 of ANVUR's founding regulation, d.P.R. 1st february 2010 N.76, *italics added by the authors*).

Hence, from a genealogical point of view, *technological transfer* (or, more abstractly, Knowledge Transfer, KT) results to be the first root of the Italian way to Third Mission, in accordance with the general development of the notion in the U.S. and in other European countries (cf. *supra* para. literature review; also Secundo et al., 2017).

> Although the first explicit university KT activities were promoted in the early-1970s, they were considered as a sort of an epiphenomenon. In fact, universities were often totally indifferent to explicit KT activities, and sometimes even opposed to them. Only recently (since the mid-1990s), KT from university to industry aroused growing interest among both academics and politicians. Thus, most Italian universities realised progressively the potential deriving from the exploitation of their own research outcomes. As a consequence, most Italian

> universities have founded their own KT offices over the last decade. Simultaneously, a set of national laws and regulations determined better institutional conditions to allow university researchers to be involved in KT activities (e.g., by participating to the creation of spin-off companies or by sharing part of the revenues arising from patent licensing), and universities to properly promote KT (i.e., by setting up KT offices, science parks and business incubators) (Baldini, Fini & Grimaldi, 2015).

The two main aspects of KT are valorisation of intellectual property (patents) and the creation of new companies created by faculties to exploit the knowledge produced by academic activities in a profit-making perspective (spin-offs). Cesaroni & Piccaluga (2016) and an OECD document (2019) sketch the italian situation as follows:

> As far as activities to support the creation of spin-off companies are concerned, the difference between the Italian and the European and US systems does not appear as pronounced as for the other aspects, provided that the number of new spin-offs created annually by Italian universities is perfectly comparable with that of European universities and less that 50 % smaller than that of US counterparts (Cesaroni & Piccaluga, 2016, p. 758). Expenditures for intellectual property (IP) protection have been increasing almost everywhere. Patents, however, are still highly concentrated: approximately 12 Italian HEIs (out of approximately 90 HEIs) generate some 50% of total patents, which concentrate, in turn, into 4 scientific disciplines, namely: industrial and information engineering; chemistry; medicine; and biology. In addition, the revenues from the valorisation of patents are typically concentrated: 50% of the revenues are concentrated in only 3 universities and 10 patents (OECD, 2019, p.27).

The main activities of KT were thus related to the economic exploitation of intellectual results through the acquisition and valorisation of patents; through joint-ventures and contracts with firms and through the creation of spin-off enterprises. This is a typical market-oriented, entrepreneurial activity of the university as an economic 'private' subject, conducted in the perspective and with the goal to promote a source of self-sustainment through gains and profits. Now, KT was commonly considered among Italian academics as a task for STEM and particularly engineering and the biomedical sector disciplines. That doesn't mean that important engagement towards society at large wasn't part of the normal academic activities: for example, consulting activities towards private and public institutions (corporate firms, public administration) were largely present in law, economics and the other social sciences; history and the humanities were deeply mobilised in the conservation and valorization of the rich cultural Italian heritage. University research conducted through specific contracts on the request and for the

sake of (public or private) third parties was a common activity of any Italian university department. Moreover, social (and political) engagement, sometimes leaning towards militancy, was a clearly defined part of the image and practice (as intellectuals) of many Italian academic individuals and groups.

What lacked was a single notion under which to subsume the whole of these activities; and the Third Mission (with its negative, residual and thus wide and 'hospitable' connotation) came off as an appropriate label. But its entrepreneurial, capitalising connotation is evident considering some of its previous labels as 'third stream' of funding or 'third leg' (Frondizi et al., 2019).

What may seem surprising, on the contrary, is the fact that the development of the notion of Third Mission within the Italian HE system is happening without huge debates and polemics. That's due to the fact that the development of the notion is not as much driven, though within the limits of the Italian academic community, by a public debate, as it constitutes mainly a 'technical' development and implementation of the term 'Third Mission' (Terza Missione) within the protocols of the main evaluative national exercise operated over the years (from 2004-2010 until 2020-2024) by ANVUR (Balus, 2021). The Evaluation of the Quality of Research (known with the acronym VQR, its main focus being evidently on the Second Mission), whose results now deeply orient the distribution of symbolic and material resources of the HE system. Then, from this very specific, but central, source, 'Third Mission' spread into relevance for the actors of the Italian HE system mainly for the (marginal, in relation to the Second Mission weight) potential of symbolic and tangible resources it purports to grant (to the 'deserving') within the reward mechanisms built into the Italian HE governance system along clear NPM lines.

Third Mission in VQR 2004-2010 is defined as "Propensity of university structures for openness to the socio-economic environment, exercised through the enhancement and transfer of knowledge", reduced to the combination of a group of indicators into an index and considered as part of an evaluative national exercise (whose units of analysis were university departments).

During VQR 2011-2014, the distinct nature of Third Mission was acknowledged, and a separate section of evaluation was prepared — but Third Mission was not considered in calculating premium quotes of public funding:

> The Third Mission by its nature is composed of many heterogeneous activities, such that the related indicators are far from the state of standardization, comparability and aggregability required to allow for synthetic metrics and comparisons between universities; there is no system of weighing between research, teaching and Third Mission; as the legislation currently stands, while research indicators (VQR)

> and (in part) teaching indicators entered into the calculation of the premium share of the Ordinary Financing Fund, no provision exists regarding the use of Third Mission indicators for funding purposes (ANVUR 2015b, p.2, *translated by the authors*).

Moreover, there was an analytical effort over the notion of 'Third Mission' which resulted in an 'handbook' for its evaluation (ANVUR 2015c) over which an open consultation of stakeholders was conducted (ANVUR 2015b).

In VQR 2015-2019 Third Mission was the object of a separate evaluation based on a method of collected case studies referred to departments or other university sub-units. A very similar method is proposed for the next evaluation exercise (VQR 2020-2024).

Finally, it is possible to state that the emerging Italian notion of Third Mission is strictly linked with the key governance role played by ANVUR. This governance model, as much as it is clearly oriented to a NPM logic, appears to contradict that logic to the extent that it constitutes a centralised system, in which the tools of strategic decision, performance assessment and management are less instruments of autonomous, responsible and accountable action of an entrepreneurial inner-directed subject than prescriptions to be complied by a disciplined subject under continuous direction, scrutiny and 'threat' from a hierarchical superior (The Ministry) and its sharp-eyed informer and executor (ANVUR). As much as the Third Mission is a typical expression of an autonomous, entrepreneurial, innovative university, these bureaucratic dynamics that seem to continue to haunt Italian universities from the past could hinder the development of such a Mission. Considerations on this line of argument seem present also in a recent OECD's Analysis of the Italian way to Third Mission:

> Italian HEIs' capacity to engage is negatively affected by the vast regulatory framework they are subjected to as public bodies. Based on evidence collected in case studies, there may be a disconnect between the formal institutional autonomy of universities and the cumbersome regulations and specific (sometimes conflicting) incentives offered by the government. An example of this disconnect is that the evaluation system takes only into account the research performance of HEIs. It provides an adverse incentive for diversifying institutional strategies, de facto limiting the internal steering autonomy of universities. Bibliometric indicators are quite common in performance-based allocation mechanisms in use in other European countries. However, in Denmark or Finland, for instance, the performance-based mechanism that assesses research outcomes allocates about 2% of the total public funds to HEIs. Conversely, in Italy, the funding scheme emphasises research at the expense of other HEI missions. The current emphasis on scientific excellence at the level of individual entities and researchers

is widely perceived to have a crowding-out effect on entrepreneurial and Third Mission activities (OECD, 2019, p.161).

Discussion and conclusion

Making a comparison among the three HEIs considered it is possible to identify contextual and historical factors that influenced the emergence of a Third Mission in each country. Firstly, the research area experienced very rapid changes over the last decades. The Second World War caused a growing recognition of the value of scientific research, especially for economic development of countries. Unprecedented discoveries made the academic world a competitive one. These processes increased the individual competitiveness as well, accelerating the working process, chasing efficiency in the research production process (i.e. responding quickly to tenders, quickly publishing, filing a patent before others) (Fave-Bonnet, 2002).

In addition, a general framework of "constant or decreasing levels of public financing of universities in Continental Europe, encouraged [academic institutions] to look at markets for technologies as a source of complementary funding" (Geuna, 2001 cited in Della Malva, 2013, p.214). Finally, there was a steady increase in student enrollment due to the democratisation of higher education pathways.

Furthermore, since the late 1980s, the subvention of universities relied more and more *on problem-oriented* and *industry-oriented* public programs rather than on public budgetary channels."This switch in funding could be considered a result of the shrinking of European public research budgets as well as change in the rationale for science support" (Della Malva, 2013, p.214, note 3).

The centralized mode left a place, at least in part, to *industry oriented* public programs. This process, in addition to the others, pushed universities to seek solutions in the Neoliberal model of governance more market oriented than the Continental and centralised one (Agasisti & Catalano, 2006).

Hence, it is possible to underline that a reformistic trend, embedded in Neo-liberal mode of governance, took place in the 1980s as a result of the introduction of Technological transfer and innovation initiatives in every considered country. The Third Mission's concept emerged in every country : firstly in Spain in 1998, secondly in France in 1999 and thirdly in Italy in 2010.

The Knowledge Transfer (KT) shaped the emergence of the notion of Third Mission in each of the three countries. Each country followed NPM principles. The main difference is that while Italy and France maintained centralisation over time, Spain gave more and more autonomy to its regions.

Tab. I The emergence of Third Mission's concept: a comparison among three HEIs

	France	**Spain**	**Italy**
Main 3M concept dimensions	Technology transfer activities	Technology transfer activities	Technology transfer activities
Main constraints in the adoption of the 3M	Increased administrative tasks and students scientific training for academics	No reward mechanism is provided for TM activities	A reward mechanism is only recently being implemented at the departement level

The main concept dimensions and main constraints in the adoption of Third mission in France, Spain and Italy

The Third Mission is today a prescriptive dimension for academics in all the three countries examined. But, equally in each of them, academic careers and salaries move largely according to the indicators of the second mission, namely research productivity (and, to a lesser extent, of the first mission, teaching productivity). Therefore, the Third Mission is identified as a duty for academics but it doesn't constitute at the moment a channel of salary and career progression. No incentives are given for Third Mission activities and academics must manage their working time among it and the other two missions, creating an over-workload.

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