Chapter 13
Investigating Social Inclusiveness of Universities in Latvia: Policy Discourse and University Practices

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Abstract This chapter examines the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the promotion of social inclusiveness, both internally and externally. The empirical study is based on the case of Latvia, providing qualitative analysis of the official national policy discourse and the formal discourse represented by the medium-term strategies of the six public universities along with an identification of examples of socially inclusive innovative practices undertaken by these HEIs. The study concludes that, despite the pressing nature of the topic in the country, social inclusiveness of higher education occupies a comparatively marginal place in the official policy and university discourse. Nevertheless, the studied practices reveal that there is quite a wide spectrum of initiatives present in the field of formal and informal adult education, community engagement, counselling, as well as social assistance that are nonprofit oriented and make a notable contribution to promoting social inclusiveness by addressing diverse public needs.

Keywords Latvia • Universities • Social inclusiveness • Social innovation • Higher education

Introduction: Positioning Universities in the National Social and Economic Development of Latvia

It has been widely acknowledged that universities, and higher education institutions (HEIs) more generally, have been undergoing a range of transformative developments that are accompanied by diverse new challenges regarding the production and application of knowledge and the contribution to national social and

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economic development (Gibbons et al. 2007; Neave 2000; Etzkowitz et al. 2000; King 2003; Bridges et al. 2007; Göransson and Brundenius 2011; Geuna and Rossi 2015). HEIs are seen as crucial in ensuring accessibility of tertiary education, tackling social exclusion and inequalities, and promoting the competitiveness and social welfare of both individuals and nations. Universities figure as important players of knowledge and innovation creation in national economies and are increasingly involved in various commercial and non-commercial partnerships with external agents.

Nowadays the academic discourse is becoming more concerned with university partnerships not only with public authorities and private sector representatives but also with civil society, thus making the university take a more visible role in stimulating and guiding the utilisation of knowledge for social, cultural, and economic development (Göransson et al. 2009a). The so-called third mission of universities provides for the development of increasingly multiform links with a wider community along with their so far primary functions of education and research and responsiveness to the needs identified beyond the academic community. Nevertheless, one can observe a differentiation between societal (i.e. serving community needs) and technological (i.e. technology transfer to industry) third mission in speaking about various types of cooperative outreach functions of universities (Göransson et al. 2009b).

Latvia, which represents an East European country having undergone transformations in almost all sectors of the economy since the 1990s, after regaining its independence from the former Soviet Union (USSR) (see Adamsone-Fiskovica et al. 2011), has been enlisted among countries where "*the political rhetoric often claims a closer interaction between universities and society, but in the factual implementation rules, technology transfer towards industrial enterprises dominates*" (Göransson et al. 2009b:160). The discourse on third mission of universities in Latvia has thus been more inclined towards stressing the technological dimension of this kind of extension activities (Adamsone-Fiskovica et al. 2009) and has been a rather technocratic one (Ādamsone-Fiskoviča, 2012). Yet, the overall national debate and various policy interventions are evolving, opening room for further studies on the social and economic role and the manifold missions of universities in Latvia.

Recent academic studies on universities in Latvia have focused on the present role of HEIs in regional development (Vīksne 2010; Tisenkopfs et al. 2011; Stankevičs 2015) as well as the contribution of universities to the national economy in terms of innovation and other public services (Association of the Universities of Latvia 2012). Rather extensive research has been carried out on university-business-government partnerships (Muravska and Prause 2012; Ozols et al. 2012; Jarohnovich and Avotiņš 2013; Kronberga 2014). Research efforts have also been directed towards examining bottom-up innovations within universities and the contribution made by those to university change towards a new mode of knowledge production (Kunda 2014).

Another group of national studies have focused on the current role of tertiary education and the profile of HEI students with specific interest in social and economic conditions of student life (Koroļeva et al. 2013), the role of diverse socio-economic and demographic factors in the formation and development of higher education attainment (Cunska 2011), as well as in ensuring higher education accessibility (Kaša 2008; Vasiļevska 2014). Researchers have also investigated the drop-out trends among tertiary students (Šmitiņa 2011; Paura and Arhipova 2014), the development of integration skills in the multicultural environment of HEIs (Roskoša 2012), the discrimination trends of foreign students (Kārkliņa 2014), as well as private and social returns on education (Spuriņš 2011; Romele 2014). Also the overall efficiency of the national system of higher education has been assessed (Paņina 2011; Aleksejeva 2014).

The main underlying message of these studies conveys the existence of a wide range of problems and challenges faced by HEIs in Latvia, both internally and externally as well as the perceived task and eagerness of national HEIs to raise their profile in order to ensure long-term presence nationally, financial viability, as well as adherence to practices of inclusive and sustainable development. This chapter aims to add on to these studies by providing a complementary insight into the way the emerging policy discourse and university practices incorporate the notion of social inclusiveness and address the social function of higher education and universities in Latvia.

The structure of this chapter is organised in a way to, firstly, outline selected theoretical and conceptual considerations in relation to inclusive development and social innovation and the underlying notion of social inclusion, both more generally and specifically in the domain of higher education.

Secondly, a brief sketch of the position of Latvia with regard to indices of social inequality is provided in order to set the background for analysing the national policy response to the resulting societal challenges. The emphasis here is on the envisaged role of science, technology, innovation, and higher education as laid out in a range of recent medium-term (2014–2020) national policy documents. This section focuses on outlining the national policy context present in Latvia and the way the various key notions (e.g. inclusive growth, social cohesion, social innovation, social entrepreneurship) are interrelated in the national and supranational (European Union) policy discourse.

Thirdly, attention is shifted from the macro-perspective to the meso-level of universities acting as agents of inclusive development and social innovation. The section reviews the mission statements and most recent strategic documents of public universities in Latvia as regards their self-perceived social role. This analysis is then followed up with selected illustrative examples of tangible socially inclusive innovative practices undertaken by individual universities in different domains.

Finally, the concluding section summarises the key findings of the empirical study, relating those to the theoretical concepts analysed in the chapter and the policy implications of the conclusions drawn from the resulting analysis.

Merging the Notions of Inclusive Development and Social Innovation: Theoretical and Conceptual Considerations

The broader topic regarding inclusive development focuses on the efforts made by different actors on various levels to achieve inclusive growth—economic growth and social development that is of value for as wide societal groups as possible (Paunov et al. 2013). More specifically, inclusive development can be defined as "*a process that occurs when social and material benefits are equitably distributed across divides within societies, across income groups, genders, ethnicities, regions, religious groups, and others. These benefits necessarily comprise not only economic and material gains, but enhanced well-being and capabilities as well as social and political empowerment being widely experienced*" (Hickey et al. 2015:5). Thus it represents a comprehensive concept that embodies the values of fairness, non-discrimination, solidarity, democracy, and civic engagement.

Inclusive development, which is primarily aimed at improving the conditions of those not so well situated, frequently marginalised societal groups, often implies stimulation of social innovation. Social innovation is seen as one of the ways to tackle social exclusion and segregation, and meet social needs of different communities (Moulaert et al. 2013). One of the readings of the concept of social innovation attributes it to innovative collaboration models and practices, and novel partnerships between individuals and/or organisations. In the context of inclusive development it implies building stronger links between knowledge and training institutions and organisations in the private and public sectors and calls for the establishment of interactive learning spaces where different kinds of organisations and expertise can meet and exchange ideas (Johnson and Andersen 2012). As noted by Giovany Cajaiba-Santana (2014), one of the distinctive features of social innovation lies in its immaterial structure, since social innovation "*does not come to fore as a technical artefact, but as new social practices that will ultimately become institutionalised*" (p. 43). Thus he brings forward a conceptualisation of social innovation "*as a collective creation of new legitimised social practices aiming at social change*" (Cajaiba-Santana 2014:49), which is sometimes treated by other scholars as a "*paradigm shift in the organisation or delivery of provision*" (Sinclair and Baglioni 2014:471).

Alternatively, a social innovation can be defined as "*a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals*" (Phills et al. 2008). This reveals a certain discrepancy between ascribing the "social" to the nature of interaction between agents or the goal of a particular innovative undertaking. It is possible, however, also to identify efforts in integrating the two interpretations, whereby social innovations are defined as "*new ideas (products, services, and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations*"—innovations that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act (Murray et al. 2010:3). As argued by Simone Baglioni and Stephen Sonclair

(2014), in the case of social innovation "*the nature of the 'innovation' can be in the content (what action is taken) or the process of provision (how needs are met)*" (p. 409). In a similar vein, Bonifacio (2014) brings forward a view that social innovation entails innovations "*that respond to social demands that are not traditionally addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards the vulnerable groups in society*" and relate "*not only to developing innovative solutions to address social demands, but also to new forms of organisation and interactions to tackle social issues*" (p. 148). Thus boosting the capacity for action of individuals, empowering citizens, and strengthening civil society all constitute an important part of what social innovation is perceived to be about.

Social innovation is primarily aimed at meeting the needs or providing solutions for wider societal groups without an underlying motive of bringing commercial gains as the classical concept of innovation would presume. At the same time this does not rule out a perspective on social innovation as a driving force of successful entrepreneurship, whereby organisations offer business solutions to urgent social and ecological challenges (Osburg and Schmidpeter 2013). Yet, in their efforts to define the concept of social innovation, Eduardo Pol and Simon Ville (2009) urge to make a distinction between social innovation and business innovation, since "*social innovations are not necessarily driven by the profit motive and business innovation need not be social innovations*" (p. 881). According to their definition, social innovation refers to "*any new ideas with the potential to improve either the macro-quality of life or the quantity of life*[1]" (Pol and Ville 2009:882) or, alternatively, "*new ideas improving quality or quantity of life not showing potential profits*" (Pol and Ville 2009:884). They specify the category of "pure social innovations" to refer to the set of social innovations that are not business innovations and address needs that are not satisfied through the market mechanism. As noted by Carlo Borzaga and Riccardo Bodini (2014), the exploration of the dynamics of such pure or "non-profit-seeking" social innovation so far has been lacking investigation of the process that leads to social innovation, on the one hand, and the characteristics of the actors or organisations that carry it out, on the other (p. 416).

With regard to the specific role of HEIs as agents of social innovation scholars point to their closer engagement with society and its needs via certain forms of professional training, partnership, consultancy, and research, thus acting "*as a change agent or catalyst in society by playing an active, direct and constructive role in the identification and resolution of society's practical problems*" (Janiūnaitė and Gudaitytė 2007:224). Through engagement in social innovation universities also demonstrate their potential to contribute to the broader goal of social inclusion with novel solutions being developed in order to increase participation amongst nontraditional, previously excluded groups (Basit and Tomlinson 2012).

Social inclusiveness of higher education is being largely attributed to the accessibility of education, implying that all people irrespective of their origin, age, gender, ethnicity, social class, income, or physical and mental abilities have equal opportunities in obtaining education. The accessibility of education can be viewed

[1] Life expectancy at birth.

in terms of institutional, financial, legal, physical, and intellectual accessibility or based on such groups of resources as the value system, intellectual potential, financial means, social capital, and territorial conditions (Vasiļevska 2014). The basic underlying assumption is that inclusive higher education serves as a prerequisite of a democratic society to achieve greater equity, social justice, and public participation. The contribution of tertiary education to higher employability and wages, labour productivity, as well as better health, life satisfaction, and civic engagement indices of those having graduated at HEIs is only one of the classically cited economic and social benefits for individuals and society at large.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that the expansion of tertiary education has brought about also some critical questions regarding the actual effects of these developments on social inclusion vs. exclusion (Duru-Bellat et al. 2008) and the potential of higher education to reduce or increase inequalities (Unterhalter and Carpentier 2010), the relationship between education and social cohesion more generally (Green et al. 2006), the frequent abuse of the equity discourse (Archer 2007), the stratification of the tertiary sector into elite and non-elite institutions (Hughes 2015), as well as the necessity of accompanying fiscal and social spending policies aimed at reducing income inequality in order to ensure the equalising effect of the expanding higher education on income distribution (Carnoy 2013). Nevertheless, these considerations do not undermine the importance of the inclusiveness of higher education—an issue that remains high on the agenda in both academic and policy debate.

While frequently equitable access (mass) and quality (elite) are treated as conflicting—conservative vs. liberal—goals of higher education, scholars argue that the underlying notions of access, participation/engagement, and success through empowerment can actually be seen to reflect increasingly embracing degrees of social inclusion, thus offering an integrative approach to social inclusion as a combination of ideologies of neo-liberalism, social justice, and human potential (Gidley et al. 2010). In the framework of this particular study, the specific role of universities in promoting social inclusiveness is treated from two alternative aspects (see Fig. 13.1). On the one hand, it is about social inclusiveness of universities as to ensuring equal access to higher education by all members of society irrespective of their economic and social status, and physical and mental capabilities. On the other hand, social inclusiveness can also be attributed to the way and the level universities respond to the practical needs of diverse societal groups (including marginalised ones) in their research efforts.

This chapter deals with both of these dimensions since they are seen as rather complementary ones, with the "internal" and the "external" inclusion being constitutive of the overall social inclusiveness of universities. One of the underlying assumptions is that wider accessibility of higher education implies the representation of a more diverse spectrum of individuals from various social groups among the pool of students,[2] which, in turn, contributes to the multiplication and awareness-building of alternative perspectives crucial in the identification of topical issues in

[2] This could also be attributed to the administrative and academic staff at universities; yet this dimension is out of the scope of this study.

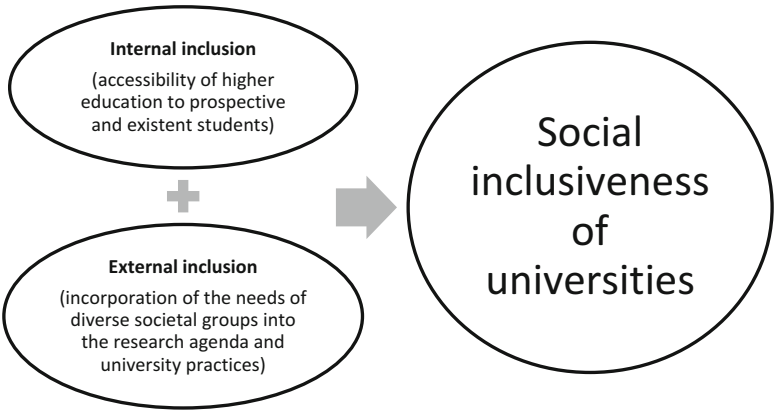

Fig. 13.1 Components of social inclusiveness of universities (*source*: by author)

research and other activities pursued by universities. With reference to the concepts reviewed above social inclusiveness of universities is hereby treated as guided by the idea of inclusive development of society at large, seeing social innovation as one of the embedded instruments for putting this idea into practice.

Prior to the assessment of the social inclusiveness of universities in Latvia and the analysis of university strategies and practices the broader national policy context and the way the different key notions are interrelated in the national and supranational (EU) policy discourse are outlined.

The National and Supranational Policy Discourse of Inclusive Growth and Social Equality: Implications for Higher Education

The notion of inclusive development largely stems from the diverse inequalities present in societies in both developing and more developed countries, with Latvia being no exception to this trend. While the country has been celebrated for being able to successfully overcome the major economic crisis that burst out in 2008 (European Commission 2012), it is nevertheless enlisted among the countries with the highest income inequality in the EU. According to the Gini index, which measures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution, in 2012 Latvia came first among the EU countries with its value of 35.7 against the EU28 average of 30.6[3] (Eurostat 2015a).[4] Moreover, in 2012, Latvia was ranked third with

[3] Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.

[4] Later data show that the index value for Latvia decreased to 35.2 in 2013, but went up to 35.5 again in 2014.

the highest share of persons being at risk of poverty or social exclusion[5] (Bulgaria—49 %, Romania—42 %, Latvia—36 %, EU28—25 %) (Eurostat 2015b). While there has been a gradual positive trend in 2013 (35 %) and 2014 (33 %), these developments do not yet indicate that an acceptable level of social equality has been achieved.

A quantitative study commissioned by the World Bank devoted to exploring poverty and income inequality trends in Latvia in an EU comparison before, during, and after the financial and economic crisis demonstrates that inequality in Latvia increased between 2004 and 2009 and the income of the wealthier groups grew proportionately more than that of those below the poverty threshold (Gasior and Lelkes 2013). The authors argue that changes between 2006 and 2009 indicate the deepening of poverty and increasing polarisation, since differences across social groups in the extent of poverty gap (the depth of poverty) were much smaller in 2006 than in 2009.

Analysts note that, unlike the tax and benefit systems in many economically developed countries, where social security means assistance for people in difficult circumstances and support for the needy, the Latvian system supports its rich more than the poor (Spriņģe 2012). This situation has also led to a notable wave of outward migration of a large part of the economically active population. According to calculations made by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB), between 2000 and 2013 almost 260,000 people have left the country and have not returned (CSB 2014). Thus the impact born by the economic growth of the pre- and post-crisis years on social inequality and its differentiated impact on the well-being of different social groups (not least in terms of regional disparities) are rather pressing ones in Latvia.

The striking inequality among the Latvian population has inevitably entered the national policy discourse, with the ministers of finance and welfare having come up with a declaration made in the beginning of 2013 to make the reduction of social inequality a national priority. As stated by the Minister of Finance of that time, "*it is obvious that on a macroeconomic level we are convincingly moving towards growth, but it is important that this is also experienced by every single inhabitant of Latvia, especially those with lower levels of income and working families with children*" (Ministry of Finance 2013).

Nevertheless, policymakers are being strongly criticised for not taking adequate steps towards eliminating the impoverishment of large groups of society. According to an assessment made by the Council of the European Union (2014), "*the effectiveness of social protection in terms of poverty reduction remains poor and designing an effective social safety net remains a challenge. Overall, a high proportion of the population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and even more so for children. Families with children, the unemployed, people with disabilities and people living in rural areas are at a particularly high risk of poverty and social exclusion*" (p. 8).

[5] It implies being at least in one of the following three conditions: (1) at-risk-of poverty after social transfers, (2) severely materially deprived, (3) living in households with very low work intensity. The relative shares among the Latvian population in 2012 were 19.4, 26.0, and 11.5, respectively.

Also the assessment made by the OECD (2015) observes that Latvia lags behind other OECD countries and regional peers in a number of social and economic dimensions measuring the quality of life and recommends that the limited resources are used in an efficient way to make growth more inclusive and reduce the poverty risk.

It has to be acknowledged that inclusive development has been part of the official national policy discourse already for several years. The *National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020* is built around the vision "Economic breakthrough—for the greater well-being of Latvia" (NDP 2020, 2012), which is largely based on the premise of inclusive, sustainable, and competitive economic development. One of the 12 strategic objectives of the NDP is aimed at ensuring "Advanced research and innovation and higher education". The role of universities (as higher education and research institutions), however, is mainly seen in promoting commercialisation of research results and closer cooperation with industrial sector with an aim of increasing private investment in science and research funding. Namely, the focus is on the transfer of research and innovation to business; yet no mention is made of the role of universities in providing innovative solutions to the public at large—social innovations, which are crucial in ensuring inclusiveness and sustainability of the overall development of the nation. The "social" component briefly emerges only under the envisaged individual measures to be carried out within the above-mentioned strategic objective, represented by the measure "Ensuring access to higher education". The latter was initially echoed also by the draft Partnership Agreement for the European Union Funds Programming Period 2014–2020; yet references to the particular policy measure aimed at ensuring equal accessibility of higher education had been excluded in a more recent version of the document (Ministry of Finance 2014).

One of the action lines brought forward also by the *G*uidelines of *R*esearch, *T*echnological *D*evelopment and *I*nnovation for 2014–2020 elaborated by the Ministry of Education and Science envisages linking science, technology, and innovation with the needs of society and economic development (Cabinet of Ministers 2013). Though brief mention is made of social (and eco) innovations, again the main emphasis is placed on the promotion of entrepreneurship. In comparison, the National Concept on the *D*evelopment of *H*igher *E*ducation and *H*igher *E*ducation *I*nstitutions in Latvia for 2013–2020 elaborated by the Council of Higher Education (2013) seems to be a more progressive one regarding the role of civil society. Nevertheless, it is still primarily based on the conventional model of Triple Helix (government-industry-academia) and the notion of "Entrepreneurial University", though with some references being made to the expanded version of the model (including dimensions of creativity, culture, and sustainability). The authors of the concept draw attention to the critical social dimension of higher education in Latvia characterised by one of the deepest social gaps in Europe, inter alia caused by the lack of state budget-funded study places and limited availability of social assistance instruments in the form of different scholarships and student loans. This implies that young people in Latvia whose parents have low or medium level of education are more likely to be left without higher education than their peers in other Baltic countries or Scandinavia (Council of Higher Education 2013).

The very notion of "inclusive education" per se has not been part of the documented policy discourse until the late 2000s with the adoption of the Basic *G*uidelines for the *D*evelopment of *E*ducation for 2007–2013 and has been mostly attributed to education levels prior to tertiary education (Nīmante 2008). The Sustainable *D*evelopment *S*trategy of Latvia until 2030 adopted by the Latvian parliament stresses that "*inequality of income and territorially unequal demographic situation in long-term may create significant obstacles for the provision of equal opportunities and access to education*" (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia 2010:32) emphasising the role of the public sector in levelling out the possibilities of people to acquire education and appropriate qualification. The successive Basic *G*uidelines for the *D*evelopment of *E*ducation for 2014–2020 defines that "*the overarching goal of the education development policy lies in high quality and inclusive education for the development of personality*, *human well-being, and sustainable national growth"* (Ministry of Education and Science 2013:9). This document features already a more pronounced focus on ensuring accessibility of education also at tertiary level, emphasising measures for facilitating the entry of socially less protected groups of the population (incl. persons with disabilities and special education needs). It stresses the role of higher education in contributing to the better employability prospects of these social groups. A rather important role is attributed also to the contribution of HEIs to the advancement of adult, continuing and distance education.

The term "inclusive growth" has entered the national policy discourse in Latvia largely through the supranational goals of the EU, which Latvia is part of since 2004. For instance, "Europe 2020", which sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the twenty-first century, puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities (European Commission 2010): smart growth (developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation); sustainable growth (promoting a more resource-efficient, greener, and more competitive economy); and inclusive growth (fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion). Along the lines of this vision, in the domain of education the National *R*eform *P*rogramme of Latvia for the *I*mplementation of the "Europe 2020" *S*trategy has defined the goal of ensuring equity in higher education as one of the key policy directions and measures to increase the number of people having acquired tertiary education. The overall declared aim is "*to improve the mechanism for granting scholarships and study and student loans, thus giving a larger number of people an opportunity to study and promoting more targeted choice of study field*" (Cabinet of Ministers 2011:31).

Europeanisation trends are also represented by the involvement of Latvia in the Bologna process, which was initiated in 1999 with an aim to facilitate cooperation in European higher education and develop the European Higher Education Area. Recently an increasing emphasis is being placed in this framework on the social dimension of higher education since "*there are still too many capable individuals who do not participate in higher education for social, cultural or economic reasons or due to insufficient systems of support and guidance*" (Council of the European Union 2013:3). The Council thus invites EU member states to "*adopt national*

objectives which are aimed at increasing the access, participation and completion rates of under-represented and disadvantaged groups in higher education, with a view to progressing towards the Bologna Process goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of Member States' populations" (Council of the European Union 2013:3). A communiqué of one of the earlier conferences of European ministers responsible for higher education has also stressed the "*importance of higher education in further enhancing research and the importance of research in underpinning higher education for the economic and cultural development of our societies and for social cohesion*" (*Bergen communiqué* 2005:3).

As can be implied, "social cohesion" has become one of the keywords of the supranational policy orientation. According to the definition provided by the OECD, "*a cohesive society works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility*" (OECD 2011:51). Like the notion of inclusive growth, the accompanying concept of social cohesion has also become one of the buzzwords of policymakers in Latvia for over a decade. At the same time the concept of social innovation, which has entered the EU policy thinking already since 2007,[6] highlighted by the European Commission (EC) Social Innovation Report (EC 2011a) and occasionally treated "*as the only way to align the Commission's conservative-liberal policy [..] with the pressing social demands that stem from the 2008 financial crisis*" (Bonifacio 2014:145),[7] has so far seen a rather slow take-up in the national policy discourse in Latvia.[8]

An exception, to some extent, is represented by the notion of social entrepreneurship as one of the modes of social innovation that has gradually entered the policy discourse in Latvia. For instance, the Declaration of the Intended Activities of the Cabinet of Ministers in office in 2014 envisaged elaboration of the concept on the opportunities to introduce social entrepreneurship in Latvia, aimed at assessing the alternatives for the development of inclusive social entrepreneurship and offering support for the development of social entrepreneurship by separating it from other types of activities (Cabinet of Ministers 2014). The concept has been approved by the government in October 2014, and in 2015 work on a new policy initiative in the form of a pilot project of a funding programme for 2016–2018 under the guidance of the Ministry of Welfare was underway. The specific activity shall be aimed at identifying and testing optimal solutions for the creation and development of social

[6] See the portal of the "Social Innovation Europe" initiative funded by the European Commission's DG Enterprise and Industry at https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/socialinnovationeurope/.

[7] The link between the upsurge of the notion of social innovation in the policy debate and the onset of the economic crisis has been noted also by Borzaga and Bodini (2014).

[8] A search for a keyword "social innovation" (in Latvian) in the portal of legislative acts adopted in Latvia (www.likumi.lv, accessed on 17.07.2014) retrieved only two entries, both pertaining to the Partnership agreement for the programming period 2014–2020 of the European Investment funds (adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers on 19 June 2014), which are related to the implementation of the "Europe 2020" strategy. As of 1 January 2014, Latvia has been granted access also to the EU Programme for employment and social innovation for 2014–2020.

enterprises, simultaneously increasing employment opportunities, for the more severely disadvantaged persons in particular. This initiative is also expected to eventually result in a special national law on social entrepreneurship.

It should be noted that this development can also be largely treated in the light of the EU policy, since, based on the above-mentioned vision of inclusive growth, the EC has also brought the concept of social entrepreneurship on the agenda (EC 2011b), inter alia emphasising the role of social innovation as a means for finding new solutions to societal problems, in particular the fight against poverty and exclusion. Yet, the entrepreneurial, business-oriented focus of this policy discourse largely excludes universities from the scope of direct agents in this domain. It is more likely that HEIs can rather be treated as nurturers of individuals and start-ups (e.g. through training, student business incubators) that could bring further the idea of social enterprise in their careers before or after graduation or as collaboration partners for established social enterprises. Yet, as noted in a study covering the Baltic Sea region, which does enlist HEIs and research organisations among the key stakeholders in the domain of social entrepreneurship, presently there is a lack of systematic educational support for social entrepreneurship at HEIs in Latvia with limited availability of courses on this topic (Lukjanska 2015). A national study on social entrepreneurship in Latvia also concludes that presently those business companies and NGOs that can be classified as social enterprises mainly tackle employment problems; the authors call for a broader perspective of extending and promoting these activities also to the domains of health, education, employment, integration, etc. (Lešinska et al. 2012).

On the whole, it can be argued that both national and supranational policy discourse characterising the kind of political reasoning evolving in Latvia does address the topical issues of inclusive growth and social inclusion that stem from the need to tackle the problems of social inequality in the country. Yet, the social role and potential contribution of higher education as both an arena and an instrument of social inclusion, not least by means of various forms of social innovation, so far seem to be underrepresented in the national policy documents.

The following section offers an assessment of the present state of the art of the social inclusiveness of HEIs in Latvia, based on both primary and secondary data, with a particular focus on public universities, in order to identify their potential, challenges, and responses with regard to the promotion of internal and external inclusion.

Assessing Social Inclusiveness of Universities in Latvia: Words and Deeds

Selected Indices of the Social Dimension of Higher Education in Latvia

One of the proxy indicators of social inclusiveness of higher education in a given country, as pertaining to the category of internal inclusion, is that of the overall enrolment rate in HEIs. A regional study on education in Central and Eastern Europe

and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) has ranked Latvia among the countries in the region with enrolment rates in higher education above 55 % (UNICEF 2007). Given the observed trend of massification or even universalisation in the development of the national system of higher education over the last decades, it is even being argued that "*acquiring higher education is seen more and more as an obligation rather than right*" (Cunska 2011:12). Diploma of tertiary education has thus become a social norm and an important indication of the social status of an individual in Latvia (Vasiļevska 2014). Over the recent years, however, there has been a gradual decrease in the absolute number of students in tertiary education in Latvia from 131,000 in 2004 to 89,000 in 2013 (Ministry of Education and Science (henceforth—MoES) 2014). But the latter trend largely reflects the demographic situation related to population projections (population ageing, economic emigration) characterised by an even further reduction in the number of high school leavers rather than increasing restrictions on access to higher education.[9]

As shown by the Global Higher Education Rankings 2010, Latvia also demonstrates an average ranking (8th out of 15)[10] in terms of the affordability of higher education based on the calculation of costs divided by the ability of individuals to pay them (Usher and Medow 2010). Yet, several studies point to important problems with regard to the financial aid to those willing to pursue tertiary education, not least based on the large share of students paying for their studies.[11] A study on the modernisation of higher education in Europe in respect to funding and social dimension, conducted in 2011, notes that in 2000–2007 Latvia has been the country with the most dramatic fall in the percentage share of financial aid to students (grants and/or loans) in total public expenditure at tertiary level of education (from 24.9 to 5.1 %), which is of particular importance given the fact that it was further followed by "*the most severe higher education budget cuts as a consequence of the financial and economic crisis*" (Eurydice 2011:57). The study had also enlisted Latvia among the few countries that hadn't reflected the goal of increasing and widening participation in higher education in the respective policy.

The analysis of the accessibility of higher education in Latvia in the mid-2000s demonstrated that under the given system of student funding it was not possible to speak of an equal access to higher education for students from different income groups of the population, emphasising the need to reform the policy of student subsidisation to incorporate also the socio-economic profile of a student (along with that of academic excellence) in the set of defined criteria (Kaša 2008). While there was a 2-year period (2009–2010) when, given the impact of the economic crisis, amendments to the regulations governing the allocation of state budget-funded scholarships for HEI students in force since 2004 were made in Latvia to favour

[9] A significant drop by 18–38 % in the number of students in tertiary education in 2020, if compared to that in the early 2000s, is being projected (Cunska 2012).

[10] Australia, Canada, Denmark, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and the USA.

[11] In 2013/2014, 39 % of all tertiary students in Latvia had their studies funded from the state budget, while the majority (61 %) were paying a tuition fee (MoES 2014).

social criteria over academic ones, the present system again rests on the prevalence of academic achievements and scientific excellence leaving the social condition of the applicant (e.g. disability, poorness, orphanage, parenthood) as a secondary consideration eligible only in case of equal achievement.

Therefore analysts continue to emphasise that public grants for students in Latvia are allocated mainly on the basis of academic merit, with more need-based criteria only gradually starting to be taken into account (Eurydice 2011). The present system of higher education financing, guided by the merit-based approach to budget places and grants and mostly benefiting students from better socio-economic backgrounds, thus raises questions about equity (World Bank 2014a). The deep social gap present in higher education in Latvia tends to reproduce the selectiveness of higher education system, whereby higher education is more accessible to children with higher than average social background as measured both by the education and occupation of their parents (Cunska 2011; Koroļeva et al. 2013; Vasiļevska 2014). As recommended by the experts of the World Bank, "*student financial support programs should be available to students in need, either as a way to complement or replace the funding available to the most academically prepared talented students*" (World Bank 2014b:29). Nevertheless, despite the articulation of the differing interpretations of the rationale behind the provision of public financial support for tertiary students as an instrument for providing social guarantees, on the one hand, and for motivating and supporting the most capable students, on the other, the mainstream discourse in Latvia remains to be based on excellence and merit as the governing principle in higher education.

Research also demonstrates that alongside the material factor, an even more important determinant limiting the accessibility of higher education in Latvia is represented by the territorial factor (Vasiļevska 2014). The prevalence of territorial inequality in respect to internal inclusion in the field of higher education (that builds on more limited opportunities already at earlier levels of education) thus challenges the conventional assumption that accessibility of higher education should primarily be attributed to socially disadvantaged groups such as families with low level of income, single-parent or large families, disabled persons, etc. (Vasiļevska 2014). It is also acknowledged that a high degree of segregation of students' achievements according to the urbanisation factor can be observed, with educational achievements of students who come from the economically more developed areas in Latvia being significantly higher than of those who come from less developed geographical units (Geske et al. 2006). The urban-rural divide with regard to the preconditions of entering and successfully pursuing one's studies at HEI thereby adds to the existing divides based on the level of income and physical abilities. The expansion of HEIs outside the capital in Latvia is clearly a positive indication in this respect, since they provide the opportunity to obtain tertiary education to people for whom doing so would otherwise require moving to a capital area. The share of local students that are enrolled in the non-capital universities is 50–80 % and they tend to remain in regional areas for both further study and employment (Association of the universities of Latvia 2012). Nevertheless, the presence of regional HEIs in selected cities outside the capital does not by itself

rule out the topicality of the territorial factor in the overall accessibility of higher education.

Another indication of the internal social inclusiveness of HEIs is represented by the level of student dropouts. National studies demonstrate that around one-fifth of all enrolled students in Latvia do not finalise their studies pointing to low secondary school knowledge and motivation of students (Paura and Arhipova 2014) as well as lack of efficient and comprehensive student support (incl. academic, psychological, career, and managerial consultancy) (Šmitiņa 2011). Namely, the internal inclusion does not merely pertain to the various dimensions of the accessibility of higher education at the stage of entering an HEI, but also to the various potential obstacles throughout the study process that inhibit the already enrolled students from successfully pursuing and accomplishing their studies (e.g. lack of personal or professional motivation, insufficient financial means, dissatisfaction with the study process and contents).

The external inclusion of HEIs, which, in turn, applies to the incorporation of the needs of diverse societal groups into the research agenda and university practices, demonstrates yet another component of the social dimension and inclusiveness of higher education. To some extent it is indicative of the broader science-society relations, which apply also to various forms of public engagement in research (Ādamsone-Fiskoviča 2012). A comprehensive international study on the trends and patterns related to science in society in Europe has clustered Latvia into the group of countries with a developing science communication culture—still on their way towards the model of consolidated science communication culture as present primarily in West European and Scandinavian countries with stronger traditions of dialogical, rather than one-way, science communication (Mejlgaard et al. 2012). The interdisciplinary study on the role of HEIs in the regional development of Latvia and their collaboration with a diverse spectrum of social agents representing public administration, entrepreneurship, and civil society also revealed that there is still room for ensuring a more systematic character and institutionalised forms of the existing cooperation models as well as developing strategic and innovative cooperation solutions with economic and social partners in knowledge transfer and utilisation of research potential of HEIs (Tisenkopfs and Bela 2011). The authors of the study recommend regional universities to emphasise their competencies and knowledge in providing solutions to tasks of public good, to make their research applicable to solving social and community problems.

As argued in the conceptual framework of this chapter, the domains of both internal and external inclusion by HEIs bear the potential for social innovation as a means for finding and coming up with novel and innovative ways for solving diverse societal problems either within or outside the walls of HEIs. In assessing the overall capacity for social innovation demonstrated by public universities, some useful insights can be gained from research on innovation in public sector. Though it has been focused more on public administration, it identifies three main drivers of public sector innovation: political ambition, public demand (including business and third sector), and tightening resources (León et al. 2012). At the same time researchers have noted that there is a range of structural constraints that can be faced by

public sector organisations in their efforts of being socially innovative given the level of standardisation of internal procedures and the overall orientation towards the median citizen rather than minorities and marginalised societal groups (Borzaga and Bodini 2014). It has also been argued that for "countries in transition", Latvia being among those, one can see a certain tension between a strong need for innovation and a tendency to conservatism in action (Janiūnaitė and Gudaitytė 2007). As revealed by the study on the advancement of internal (organisational) bottom-up innovations identified in selected universities in Latvia, these tend to be predominantly incremental rather than radical ones and require application of a range of more or less complex legitimation strategies on the part of innovators in order to align new practices with the norms of the academic community and holders of formal power within the organisation (Kunda 2014).

As can be implied from the preceding analysis of the present policy discourse and studies available so far on different aspects of social inclusiveness of HEIs in Latvia, the social dimension of higher education represents an issue that requires further attention. While the national legislation, represented by the law on HEIs (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia 1995),[12] does not explicitly stipulate that HEIs, incl. public universities, are obliged to promote the accessibility of higher education and contribute to tackling urgent societal problems (including those of marginalised social groups), it still implies a certain level of public accountability by HEIs. Yet, it is within their autonomy to freely select the ways and forms for the implementation of the tasks set forth by the binding legal acts and the founders of the individual HEIs. In the remaining part of the chapter, based on document analysis and expert interviews,[13] both the formal discourse and the exemplary practices of selected universities in Latvia are thus inspected to reveal the ways their social role is being constructed, communicated, and implemented.

Social Inclusiveness of Universities: Formal Discourse

Turning from the macro-perspective of the national policy discourse to the meso-level of universities acting as agents of internal and external social inclusion, this section reviews the mission statements and most recent strategic documents of public universities in Latvia as regards their self-perceived social role. The primary aim here is to identify general (both common and divergent) trends among public

[12] "*Institutions of higher education shall organise their activities in the interests of society , as well as inform society about their operations and the directions and possibilities of studies and scientific research by promoting the selection of study and scientific research according to the interests and abilities of the individual. They shall offer to society their scientific, artistic and professional findings and the methods and results of research*" [emphasis added].

[13] In total, ten interviews with experts representing individual universities as well as several non-governmental organisations were conducted in January–May 2015.

universities in terms of their rhetoric (or lack of it) on social inclusiveness rather than to make an in-depth assessment of individual HEIs.

In the framework of this study the current medium-term development strategies of all six public universities in Latvia[14] have been analysed, namely:

- Development Strategy of the Liepaja University (LiepU) for 2008–2018
- University of Latvia (UL) Strategic Plan for 2010–2020
- Development Strategy of the Daugavpils University (DU) for 2009–2016
- Latvia University of Agriculture (LUA) Strategic Development Plan for 2010–2016
- Development Concept of the Riga Stradins University (RSU) for 2013–2017
- Riga Technical University (RTU) Strategy for 2014–2020

When it comes to the formal strategies, the first bold observation shows that none of these documents incorporates the notion of "social innovation" in a straightforward way, with an exception of the Strategic Plan of the University of Latvia, which makes reference to social innovation (along with economic and organisational innovation) as one of the priorities of the UL research fields.

As for "social inclusion", it is rather the notion of **social accountability** that seems to be more common, though also mostly used in a disguised manner. An exception is the Riga Stradins University, which is specialising in healthcare and which explicitly defines a target to become a socially responsible university. As stated in its Development Concept, "*social responsibility is being reached with active involvement of the university in providing solutions to various topical societal issues by means of granting public access to the knowledge and skills of its academic staff and students*". Though without any further explication, in the given context this statement signifies the determination to promote external social inclusion by means of directing university's study and research efforts towards meeting also the practical needs of the local population of Latvia. Also the overall aim for research activities undertaken by RSU states that "*the science profile of RSU is being achieved by concentrating resources for the implementation of excellent scientific studies in medicine and social sciences, conformable with the needs and problems of the given period and society and aimed at the improvement of the overall quality of life and welfare of the society and its members*". The latter point brings this statement rather close to the theoretical notion of social innovation as discussed earlier, which implies development and implementation of new ideas and practices that aim to improve the quality of life without an explicit profit motive.

The **quality of life** aspect has been taken up also by the Development Strategy of the Daugavpils University, which places an emphasis on the sense of belonging to the region (Eastern Latvia) among its guiding values, implying that university's efforts are more generally directed at making its contribution to boosting the quality of life of its inhabitants. Likewise, the aim defined by the Strategic Plan of the

[14] In 2013/2014, there were altogether 61 HEI in Latvia, incl. 25 colleges (MoES 2014). Three out of the six public universities are located in the capital city Riga, while the other three are located in regional centres.

University of Latvia inter alia states that "*the knowledge transfer promotes the competitiveness of Latvia's national economy and improves the society's quality of life*".

On the whole, the strategy documents of public universities primarily emphasise their mission to contribute to **sustainable regional and/or national economic as well as intellectual and cultural development of the country**, with a focus on training well-qualified specialists and undertaking high-quality academic research (see also Table 13.1). Several of the strategies refer to the aspiration of universities to serve the society and meet its needs in various ways.

Table 13.1 Mission statements of public universities in Latvia

University	Mission
Daugavpils University	*To promote the development of a sustainable future society by means of carrying out world-class scientific research and ensuring high-quality education in the fields of natural sciences, engineering, education, health, humanities, and social sciences, and, through its activities, facilitating sustainable development of the Latgale region and the whole of Latvia*
Latvia University of Agriculture	*To develop the intellectual potential for sustainable future of Latvia and rural areas in particular*
Liepaja University	*LiepU is a symbol of education, science, and culture of Liepaja and the Kurzeme region that provides competitive, internationally recognised varied education, develops innovative research, ensures sustainable development of the society, and development of knowledge economy in Latvia as a lawful partner in the community of European countries*
Riga Technical University	*To ensure internationally competitive high-quality scientific research, tertiary education, technology transfer, and innovation for Latvian national economy and the society*
Riga Stradins University	*Education of high-quality specialists in the field of healthcare and social sciences for the European and world society, so the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitude obtained within the study process would comply with the highest requirements of the EU and human traditions and form stable base for the lifelong education*
University of Latvia	*The UL promotes the development of the society and state; it guarantees its students the possibility to obtain qualitative higher education and professional skills, as well as to develop through research and artistic creative activities. The UL is an active participant in the international academic life, and it fosters cultural ties, cooperation in research, and applicability of knowledge. The achievements of the UL are formed by the minds, talents, and work of its faculty and students. The UL cares for the development of the professional and creative skills of its students and faculty, combining studies with research, classical university traditions with dynamic development, serving the society and carrying Latvia's image in the world. The UL promotes the development of the Latvian language and its full-fledged functioning at all levels. It studies and maintains the Latvian cultural traditions, and supports the development of terminology in the Latvian language. The UL prepares teaching staff for other universities and general schools, as well as specialists for the country's administration and municipalities. The UL maintains and shapes collections of national significance*

Source: By author

The **promotion of innovation** is an almost indispensable element in all the strategies, yet for the most part with a clear emphasis on the commercially viable innovative solutions rather than social innovations. Though general efforts in promoting conventional business incubation at universities represent an emerging trend, the goal of facilitation of social entrepreneurship at universities amongst staff and students is presently hard to identify in the strategy documents. At the same time the above-mentioned Development Strategy of the Daugavpils University recognises the necessity to promote research cooperation not only with high-tech business companies, but also to ensure the "*openness of science to any kind of public demand for innovation in any sector of the economy*". Consultancy can be seen as one of the perceived modes of external inclusion pursued by universities, including collaboration with local municipalities, professional organisations, and entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, references to the external inclusion by universities in the domain of research regarding the public at large are mostly limited to raising the awareness and understanding of science (popularisation of science), with almost no references to more active citizen engagement in research and the agenda-setting thereof.

As for internal social inclusion, a common element in the strategic visions of almost all the analysed universities has to do with the usage of one or several of the following concepts: "continuing education", "lifelong learning", and "distance education". It has to be noted that all six universities have become involved in the Latvian Association of Higher Education Institutions for **L**ifelong **L**earning founded in 2014, with this fact serving as a vivid indication of the growing importance of this domain in the spectrum of activities pursued by universities in Latvia. All public universities in Latvia have a dedicated structural unit (centre or department) dealing with one or several of these services, offering a variety of adult learning courses and thus contributing to widening internal inclusiveness of HEIs. These trends are somewhat interrelated with the notion of "open university" (based on open entry policy and distance learning as the main method of instruction), which is also becoming an increasingly used concept in the domain of higher education of Latvia. Though used as part of the conventional study process, also the practice of ensuring e-studies is being positioned as one of the means of facilitating the accessibility of study programmes along the advancement of the quality of studies.

In the case of the official strategic vision of the Liepaja University it is the lifelong learning that links the activities pursued by the university to the promotion of social inclusion. Its Development Strategy states that "*the lifelong learning policy of the university is oriented towards meeting the individual's interests and needs related to the capacity of taking the initiative, employability, active citizenship, and social inclusiveness*". The promotion of continuing and lifelong learning is seen as a means for providing equal opportunities and broadening the present scope and profile of HEI students to include also individuals of socially disadvantaged groups, as demonstrated by the quote from the Development Strategy of the Daugavpils University, which draws attention to the fact that "*most universities tend to offer the same courses to the same group of academically best qualified young students and exclude other forms of training and kinds of trainees as, for instance, postgraduate retraining courses for adults*". At the same time it is recognised that in the existing

practice, more efforts are needed to address the continuing education needs of wider societal groups based on broader public demand, moving beyond the specific professional groups of teachers, etc.

The University of Latvia, in turn, sees lifelong learning and continuing education as a means for ensuring "*broad public accessibility to studies*", which can be interpreted as a synonym for internal social inclusiveness of higher education. Nevertheless, the UL strategy documents simultaneously acknowledge that the promotion of the field of lifelong learning (and knowledge-intensive services) serves as a means to compensate for the reduced state budget funding for HEIs. Overall, the clash of the underlying motivating factors of various initiatives is quite indicative of the overall dilemma in the higher education sector in Latvia between the fulfilment of a certain social mission and orientation towards the needs of the public at large, and the need to find alternative financial means by HEIs under conditions of comparatively limited state support. It can be argued that in many instances the official statements tend to mask the survival strategies of universities with concepts that bring to the forefront the public good, which, of course, is also present, but frequently as a by-product rather than the primary goal of these undertakings.

One can also observe the translation of activities initially pursued with a clear aim of attracting additional resources to universities into the discourse of social value being attached to those. This can be exemplified, for instance, by the increasing efforts made by HEIs in Latvia in attracting **foreign students**,[15] which has become of a particular importance with the gloomy demographic prospects regarding the decreasing number of local students in the coming years. The Development Concept elaborated by the Riga Stradins University, which takes the lead among the public universities in Latvia in the number of foreign students, features a statement that "*the considerable share of foreign students facilitates the development of a multicultural environment, encourages the financial independence of the RSU, as well as contributes to the international recognisability of the university, Riga, and Latvia*". The emphasis inter alia placed on the broader social benefits brought along with the presence of people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds within the university milieu and in society at large demonstrates the way a profit-led initiative can also be expected to have positive spill-over effects in the broader social context of inclusiveness. Though with reference to local students and academic staff, the presence of a multi-ethnic milieu can also be seen as a strength, as in the case of the Daugavpils University. At the same time it should be noted that a national study has revealed the presence of negative discrimination trends at HEIs towards foreign students as perceived by both local and foreign students studying in Latvia, inter alia drawing attention to the need for targeted measures in promoting community building and other integration-oriented activities at HEIs (Kārkliņa 2014).

Another factor of social differentiation in terms of internal social inclusion that is gradually entering the official agenda of individual universities is that of **functional**

[15] The share of foreign students at HEIs in Latvia has increased from 1 % in 2004/2005 to 5 % in 2013/2014 (MoES 2014).

disorders of students.[16] The strategies of both the Riga Technical University and the Latvia University of Agriculture, for instance, recognise their weakness in relation to the presently limited access to infrastructure for students with reduced mobility. Likewise the Development Strategy of the Liepaja University acknowledges the necessity to prioritise the adaptation of buildings and facilities for people with special needs in order to ensure unhindered access to the study process. Yet, several of the interviewed experts acknowledge the overall improvements in the physical accessibility of HEIs over the last decade, not least facilitated by the binding EU regulations defining requirements for new and renovated buildings in any sector of the economy. At the same time issues of accessibility for people with hearing, sight, or mental disorders, requiring not only physical but also pedagogical adjustments, are presently addressed in a rather unsystematic way at HEIs, based on individual ad hoc situations, and have not yet been explicitly taken up by the analysed official strategy documents of universities. A brief mention of students with sight and hearing impairments with regard to the possibilities for ensuring accessibility of higher education is only made in the Development Strategy of the Daugavpils University.

The same can be said about the **gender factor**, which has not entered the mainstream discourse of social inclusiveness of universities in Latvia. Yet, this can be explained by the persistent prevalence of women (around 60 %) among the pool of students. The only exception is the brief mention of this factor in the long-term vision presented in the Development Strategy of the Daugavpils University, which enlists "equal opportunities and diversity" among the key values guiding its activities, implying the "*lack of discrimination based on nationality, race, religious beliefs, gender or any other attributes*". In a similar vein the Strategic Plan of the University of Latvia states that it is guided by the values of "*openness and respect for diversity (ethnic, gender, physical capability, etc.), promoting equal opportunities for every member of the UL community*".

It is, however, more surprising that none of the analysed strategy documents feature explicit references to the **age factor** in the context of internal inclusion, given the fact that demographic prospects have brought age-related considerations into the national debate on accessibility of higher education. Some of the interviewed experts pointed to selected indications towards the development of initiatives aimed at bringing also older students to universities given the reducing pool of high-school leavers in Latvia. Simultaneously they noted the presence of certain stigmatising attitudes regarding adult undergraduate students at universities as well as the predominance of the conventional approach held by public officials that tends to classify students as young people. It seems that age as a factor presently takes a more central role in the context of the above-mentioned lifelong learning as a mode of adult education throughout one's lifetime rather than a definite period of time in one's youth.

[16] In 2007–2013, a special national programme funded from the EU Structural Funds was devoted to the modernisation of the premises and facilities of HEIs for the purpose of improving the quality of study programmes, inter alia aimed at ensuring accessibility of educational programmes also by persons with functional disabilities.

A peculiar issue regarding the internal social inclusiveness of universities in Latvia has to do with the **language** as a potentially discriminating factor. Though it is addressed in almost none of the above-mentioned strategic documents of the six universities, it represents an issue that tends to pop up now and then in public debates regarding higher education. This is a sensitive topic in Latvia given the large share of Russian-speaking population in the country (Latvians make up only around 60 % of the whole population) and the efforts on the political level to ensure the maintenance of the Latvian language as the sole national language and the main language of communication in the public sphere. Research, however, shows that in the light of the reform carried out in 2004 in secondary education regarding the introduction of bilingual education, the conduct of the Latvian language by school leavers graduating from minority schools is sufficient enough for pursuing studies at HEIs in Latvia and allows for their active participation in the social and economic life of the country (Kļava et al. 2010). At the same time a parallel debate has been taking place with regard to widening the usage of English (along with other official languages of the EU countries) as a study language that so far has been inhibited by the national legislation. Though certain developments have been taking place in this respect, the recommendation of the Council of the EU made in 2014 still concludes that "*despite an originally ambitious plan to reform higher education, [..] restrictions on the use of foreign languages remain unchanged"* (p. 3). It can be assumed that the language factor per se does not figure in the analysed strategy documents due to the nationally binding legal provisions that limit the possibilities for any specific arrangements by individual HEIs. An exception is the SWOT analysis in the Strategic Development Plan of the Latvia University of Agriculture, which mentions the insufficient number and possibilities for offering study courses in English (and the resulting constraints in attracting foreign students) among the present weaknesses, and sees the differing state policy regarding the Russian language use in the study process in private and public HEIs as a treat to the university's competitiveness.

Last but not least, as for internal inclusion or widening access to higher education, the group of people with low income as prospective students are also not directly referred to by the key strategic documents of universities. Here mention could only be made of the group of unemployed people, which has been highlighted by the Development Strategy of the Daugavpils University in respect of its aim of establishing selected study programmes for unemployed with initial higher education. Otherwise the **income factor** is somewhat implicitly addressed by the mission statements of several university funds that have been established at public universities. Thus, for instance, the vision of the Fund of the University of Latvia states that "*each personality with talent, thirst for knowledge and insufficient material provision in Latvia directly related to education, science and culture has an opportunity to obtain internationally recognised higher education irrespective of his social or material status and implement projects that create new intellectual values applicable in the development of science, society, and economy*"[17] [emphasis added]. In a similar vein, the Fund of the Riga Stradins University states that it aims to "*promote tthe development of higher eductaion and research activities and* support studies of the *deprived and socially disadvantaged young people as well as*

[17] See http://www.fonds.lv/par/ (in Latvian).

different activities promoting education, science, culture, health, and sports"[18] [emphasis added]. The University of Daugavpils has a special social assistance programme for students that primarily targets successful full-time students with stringent social and material conditions. Special scholarships are also granted by the Development Fund of the Latvia University of Agriculture. Such funds mainly provide these scholarships from resources granted by donors (individuals and companies in Latvia and abroad) or from income from certain activities pursued by universities, based on the principles of philanthropy. This instrument aims to mitigate the income factor as one of the main barriers with regard to the accessibility of higher education in Latvia; yet it is much too limited in scope to tackle the underlying problem entirely. As noted by experts, the income factor can determine a considerable bias in the selection of the preferable study programme by those students who, due to economic reasons, are guided primarily by the availability of state-funded study places rather than their personal interest in making their choice, which, in turn, can bear a negative effect on the dropout rates at later stages of the study process.

Overall, the reviewed strategy documents reveal that social inclusiveness—both internal and external—is not among the key issues that are formally prioritised by universities in their visions of medium-term development. With a few exceptions, in most cases the traditional factors of social differentiation present in modern societies, namely those based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, language, income, disabilities, etc., are not explicitly and extensively addressed by the analysed development strategies. Instead, it is more common to use more general attributes of the public at large when making certain implicit references to the social role of universities without specifically marking out concrete target segments or marginalised/disadvantaged groups within society. At the same time it cannot be argued that university strategies altogether ignore the idea of social inclusiveness since quite a few things described in the preceding analysis demonstrate that selected aspects of this issue, though to varying degrees, find at least some reflection in the analysed texts. Also the genre-specific nature of this kind of documents should be taken into account, whereby the strategic visions usually tend to focus on rather broad categories and ideas and are highly declarative. The differing length and the corresponding degree of detail of the analysed documents should also be noted. Nevertheless, it is believed that, alongside other sources, these strategies still represent a certain indication of the overall perception of the specific tasks and roles of HEIs in the given social milieu and in the broader official agenda of the goals pursued by universities.

Social Inclusiveness of Universities: Practices

Unlike some exemplary international practices of structural units at universities specifically devoted to dealing with development of social innovation as featured, for instance, by the Centre for Social innovation at the Stanford Graduate School of Business in the USA (established in 1999), the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation

[18] See http://www.rsu.lv/par-rsu/rsu-fonds (in Latvian).

and Entrepreneurship at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business in South Africa (2011), or the Lund University Social Innovation Centre in Sweden (2012), there are no such units currently present at the public universities in Latvia. Nevertheless, such a lack of explicitly institutionalised forms of social innovation-related activities does not automatically imply that there are no socially inclusive practices altogether.

If we treat social innovation as new ideas meeting social needs and creating new relationships or collaboration, we can identify a range of practical examples of initiatives developed by individual universities in Latvia. Based on document analysis and expert interviews conducted in the framework of this study, henceforth nine selected cases from different public universities of Latvia are described, providing a brief description of each particular practice as implemented by a specific university, as well as adding a brief note on the presence of similar practices in other universities, where applicable. At the outset it should to be noted that the selected cases serve as randomly identified practices without stating their exclusivity in the domain of higher education in Latvia or elsewhere. These should neither be treated as an exhaustive list of innovative inclusive practices undertaken by universities in Latvia but rather as a set of concrete examples where different aspects of social inclusiveness—both internal and external—can be illustrated and highlighted.

Free Legal Counselling by the Centre of Legal Practice and Advice (Legal Clinic) at the University of Latvia

Already since 1999, with an initial support provided by the Soros Foundation-Latvia, the Faculty of Law at the University of Latvia has been offering free legal counselling for people with low income on issues regarding employment rights, housing, and maintenance payments. These activities are managed by the Centre of Legal Practice and Advice that has been formed based on the model of legal clinics established in the USA back in the 1960s. This practice is organised as an optional study course as part of the study process in training master students in law with the primary aim to ensure practice opportunities for students of actual work with clients under the guidance of experienced practicing lawyers provided free of charge. The practice is preceded by introductory and specialised lectures that are aimed to equip students with the necessary basic knowledge on legal, psychological, planning, and other aspects of this work.

Though the primary mission of this incentive is the provision of a novel mode of training, it brings along the social mission of addressing and helping to solve problems critical for those individuals that do not possess the necessary financial means for this kind of legal procedures. While initially it met certain resistance from the university leadership given the lack of similar former experience in Latvia, it turned out to be a valuable service, appreciated by both students and clients. Though at the outset support was provided for the establishment of such legal clinics also at other HEIs in Latvia, the UL Centre of Legal Practice and Advice is presently the

only one that has maintained this practice ensuring its conformity with the established international standards and principles.

This practice serves as a good illustration of one of the possible modes of external inclusiveness of universities. Alongside representing an internal organisational innovation, it also demonstrates clear traits of pure social innovation given the underlying social need, the non-profit-seeking motivation, and the development of new relations between the university and selected marginalised groups in society.

Innovative Approaches to Distance Learning by the Distance Education Study Centre at the Riga Technical University

The Distance Education Study Centre was founded at the Riga Technical University in 1997, again with the help of international donors, namely in the framework of the PHARE[19] Multi-Country Cooperation project in Distance Education. As of 2014, the Centre operates as a structural unit of the newly established RTU Faculty of E-Learning Technologies and Humanities. Activities of the Centre are primarily aimed at developing lifelong learning and distance education in Latvia and to study e-Content/e-Learning-related knowledge society technologies. Some of the research and development projects carried out by the Centre include the development of multimedia e-Course for open distance learning with audio, video, and interactive technologies, research into learners' satisfaction, as well as their behaviour using open public courseware, etc. The Centre has also been involved in regional development projects on inclusive and innovative applications of e-learning, and in the development of innovative lifelong learning approaches. It has been presented with the BOLDIC Award 2013 for the innovative work done during Ebig3 project—an innovative project of open and distance learning using not only traditional Internet-based systems, but also TV and mobile technologies.

Distance education can hereby be treated not merely as a technical matter, but also as a social innovation that pertains to the efficiency of the education process, not least with regard to the accessibility of higher education in the regions and peripheral areas (Vasiļevska 2014). In line with the concept pursued by the Centre, distance education is attributed to open flexible learning that is made accessible in the form of separate study courses to people irrespective of their age, education, employment, or place of residence, ensuring that the person can study in a place, time, and tempo suitable for the particular individual. Distance education also opens an opportunity of studies to those adults who haven't had a chance to obtain education at different levels due to work, family conditions, disability, imprisonment, etc. Thus this social innovation allows for increased internal inclusion through widening access to and participation in education and training for broader societal groups.

[19] One of the pre-accession instruments (programme) financed by the European Union to assist the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their preparations for joining the EU.

While many other HEIs treat distance education as a potential source of additional income, the Distance Education Study Centre puts the main emphasis on the long-term benefits of increased accessibility of education and development of knowledge and skills of the users without an underlying profit motive as a key driver.

"Health Express" of the Riga Stradins University

In 2013, the medical students at the Riga Stradins University came up with an initiative to organise on-board practical activities for passengers on national inter-city trains (e.g. Riga-Rezekne, Riga-Tukums, Riga-Aizkraukle), providing an opportunity to chat with the becoming health specialists and doctors on topics related to healthy lifestyle and receive practical recommendations. During the "Health express" trips passengers have the possibility to measure their blood pressure, define their body mass index, as well as fill out different tests on their state of health. Under the same slogan similar activities since then have been organised by the RSU students also at local supermarkets in the cities of Jelgava and Liepaja as well in the Sigulda Cultural Centre.

This initiative represents a socially innovative way of passing on the knowledge accumulated at the university to the wider public, thus contributing to the broader awareness of health-related issues, which form an important part of the societal challenges faced by modern societies, among the population. Simultaneously this kind of practice also helps to develop the communication skills of vital importance for the prospective doctors.

Latvian Language Conversation Club at the Daugavpils University

Daugavpils is a multicultural city in the Eastern Latvia, with a very diverse population where Latvians make up just 18% of the total population. The Daugavpils University is the biggest state education establishment in the region. Moreover, the university has become the "Latvianness" centre of the region through offering both Latvian language study programmes and a variety of courses and activities to meet the need to improve the Latvian language skills among people from non-Latvian-speaking backgrounds.

A non-governmental organisation - Society of lifelong learning, culture, and science communication *The Intellect Park* - has been established in 2011 upon the initiative of the Daugavpils University's faculty, particularly the Latvian language teaching staff, to respond to the needs of the region's non-Latvian-speaking population by offering official (Latvian) language conversation classes for individuals and groups, as well as knowledge about the Latvian Cultural Canon. The Latvian language-speaking club with monthly meetings is actively run by Latvian language students who volunteer to communicate with local people in Latvian and also help them to draft different documents (e.g. applications, letters).

This conversation club initiative, which has achieved an unambiguous popularity among the citizens of Daugavpils, could serve as yet another good example to illustrate the richness and potential of non-profit-seeking social innovation as regards external inclusion pursued by a university through the provision of free interactive services for selected citizen groups. Overall, this initiative also plays an important role in facilitating social integration in the region and also in the country as a whole.

Engagement of the Latvia University of Agriculture in Mentoring for Promoting Women Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas of Latvia

The regional location of the Latvia University of Agriculture aligns a special role to this HEI in addressing the various challenges faced by rural areas of the country, not least with regard to unemployment. In order to make a contribution to tackling problems present in this domain, the lecturers of the Latvia University of Agriculture have entered into project-based collaboration, guided by social and non-monetary interest, with active non-governmental organisations. This collaboration has further materialised in a mentoring programme aimed at rural women, which has significantly improved employability in the surrounding Zemgale region and nationally.

The development of this mentoring practice, which is frequently mentioned as one of the most effective ways to facilitate growth and promote entrepreneurship, inter alia providing both social and economic benefits to the development of rural areas (Konstantinova 2008), started with the EU project "FEM: Women Entrepreneurship Development in the Baltic Sea Region" in 2004. It was supported by the EU cross-border programme, with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Latvia University of Agriculture, and the Latvian Rural Women Association as partners. As a result of the programme 27 mentoring pairs and 3 mentoring groups were formed, involving 40 mentees (Konstantinova 2008). At individual level the women involved in the project have gone through big changes: they have acquired confidence, and spotted the possibilities in their own countries, regions, and municipalities. The women cooperation network emerged, resulting in the creation of 6 resource centres and 12 information sites; new micro-businesses and e-commerce were started in Latvia.

This social innovation that represents another practice of external inclusion by universities particularly focuses on one of the important goals of social innovation—namely that of empowerment of citizens (a particular group thereof) and enhancement of their capacity to act. It can be added here that a similar initiative entitled "Mentoring-training-microcredit programme for rural women entrepreneurs" carried out by a non-governmental organisation in the neighbouring Estonia was shortlisted among semi-finalists of the first round of the European Social innovation competition launched by the European Commission (2012) (European Social Innovation Competition 2014).

Services of Day Nurseries at the University of Latvia

Based on student initiative, the first day nursery at the University of Latvia was open at the Faculty of Economics and Management in 2006, followed by the second one at the Faculty of Education, Psychology, and Art in 2010. These are among the first ones of this kind of facilities and services at HEIs in Latvia made available to university employees and students with children (extramural students, in particular) offering free babysitting for children from 3 to 7 years during lectures for a period up to 4 h. Children are looked after by professional babysitters who play with children and engage them in various creative activities.

This service can also be treated as a pure social innovation in Latvia aimed at facilitating better accessibility of education and reducing dropout rates among the group of young parents willing to obtain higher education. While it is hard to presently assess the actual scope and nature of the impact and the level of success of this novel practice of internal inclusion, given the lack of any in-depth studies on this topic, it certainly represents an interesting solution to a specific social need faced by a definite group of students. It is worthwhile noting that recently this practice has been followed also by other universities—since 2014 day nurseries are offered also by the Riga Technical University, and since 2015 by the Riga Stradins University and the Daugavpils University.

Engagement of Elderly People in Research at the Riga Stradins University

An interesting example of university engagement in the domain of social innovation is represented by the involvement of a group of researchers from the Faculty of Rehabilitation of the Riga Stradins University in the EU 7th Framework Programme international research project "Social Innovations Promoting Active and Healthy Ageing" (INNOVAGE, 2012–2015).[20] The overall aim of the project is to bring high-quality scientific expertise closer to societal needs with regard to ageing issues and at active involvement of elderly people in identifying and developing innovative approaches in improving their quality of life and social welfare.

The specific example of this kind of social innovation is demonstrated by the development and testing of a novel Web-based application for tablet PCs for assessing one's existing or new housing as to its physical accessibility (64 potential barriers for free movement) by elderly people (incl. ones with various disabilities). The national study involved a group of people from the given target group in Riga to provide input for and feedback on the prototype of this application that can potentially serve both as an assessment tool and a tool for developing one's capacity to solve the identified problems.

Though this application as a product per se might not turn out to be a pure social innovation given its commercialisation potential, the underlying research practice represents a tangible example of external inclusion through the incorporation of the

[20] http://www.innovage.group.shef.ac.uk/

needs of a specified and frequently marginalised societal group (that of elderly people) into the university's research agenda.

Engagement in Innovative Community Projects by the Art Research Laboratory at the Liepaja University

Selected activities in the field of social innovation as pursued by public universities as part of external inclusion can also be identified amongst the initiatives undertaken by the Art Research Laboratory established at the Liepaja University. One of those is represented by a computer game on waste management and environmental protection "The Green friend" that has been developed by students from the New Media Arts programme in collaboration with a private company. This initiative has been assessed as an illustrative example of a successful translation of knowledge into a product for an external customer as part of an assignment in a study programme while achieving internal goals and taking advantage of informal relationships (Kunda 2014). While the primary collaboration here has taken place in knowledge and technology transfer between lecturers, students, and entrepreneurs (without monetary rewards), the resulting product and its development per se have been aimed at wider community engagement in advancing public knowledge and practices of sustainable development.

Another example involves the elaboration of research-based recommendations for the local government on the development of a local area in the city of Liepaja by lecturers and students, again as part of the study process, to advance and revive the particular neighbourhood (Kunda 2014). The application of elements of action research via developing contacts with the inhabitants of the area in combination with the use of visual methods is not only an organisational innovation in the study process, but also a telling social innovation with regard to the contribution made by the university to local community.

Student Competition of Social Projects "Open Mind"

In 2007, an annual competition for students "Open Mind" was launched in Latvia by the commercial bank Hansabank (now—Swedbank) initially in cooperation with the Fund of the University of Latvia and later with the Development Fund of the Riga Technical University. Originally 15 HEIs of Latvia took part in this project, but presently it is open to any accredited HEI in Latvia, including 6 public universities. While initially eligible applicants were limited to bachelor-level students, currently projects from students from all study levels are accepted. From a scholarship competition the enterprise has transformed into a competition of social student projects with funding for the finalists granted for the implementation of the best ideas that deal with topics of high societal relevance. The aim of the competition is to motivate young people to apply the academic knowledge acquired at HEIs for finding practical solutions to common needs faced by the local society, thus contributing to

improved environment in one's HEI, city, region, and country. This initiative is aimed at promoting student engagement in the improvement of social environment and interaction between different social groups in the development of civil society.

While the notion of social innovation is not explicitly used as the key word for this initiative, the level of novelty of the proposed ideas is among the main criteria for the assessment of the projects, alongside the elements of public benefits, sustainability, and practicability. Some examples of the projects include the installation of special environmental objects in a museum park to ensure its accessibility to visually impaired people, organisation of the first sports event for people in wheelchairs, demonstrations of sand cinema, and organisation of creative workshops for children with special needs, ensuring accessibility of literature via recording of books in an audio format for different age groups, etc. This initiative thus serves as a platform for diverse social innovations stemming from national HEIs and as a facilitator of social responsibility and comprehension of this concept among students and the public at large.

Conclusions

This chapter has addressed the role of universities in Latvia with regard to social inclusiveness in terms of both ensuring access to higher education and being responsive to the needs of diverse societal groups. It aimed to cover macro, meso, and micro levels of this phenomenon by means of looking into the national policy discourse, the strategic visions elaborated by individual universities, and the actual socially innovative practices undertaken by these organisations.

The study concludes that the national policy discourse regarding the extension activities of universities in Latvia is mostly narrowed down to the transfer of research results and innovative solutions to the business sector. To a much lesser extent references are made to the potential contribution made by universities to the public at large in ensuring inclusiveness and sustainability of the overall development of the country. The equal accessibility of higher education as an indication of internal inclusion by HEIs occupies a comparatively marginal place in the official discourse, though it represents an issue in the national system of higher education given the presence of such obstacles as high tuition fees, insufficient access to scholarships and student loans, as well as underdeveloped infrastructure for physically disabled people. It should also be kept in mind that social inclusiveness of universities cannot be viewed in isolation from the overall level of social equality in the country as well as from the level of inclusiveness in the previous levels of education.

Both the public policy documents and the strategies of individual universities demonstrate a certain conflict between excellence (meritocracy) and equity in relation to the accessibility of higher education in Latvia. Despite the presence of deep social gaps in higher education that tend to inhibit social and economic mobility of certain disadvantaged groups of society, there are limited instruments in place to

systematically address and tackle this problem. While the notions of "inclusive growth" and "social innovation" (though the latter to a much lesser extent) have entered the national policy documents, these tend to demonstrate trends of Europeanisation of the policy discourse through mostly formal adaptation of the declared supranational goals of the EU in the respective policy domains.

The official discourse of the six public universities of Latvia, as represented by their recent strategic development documents elaborated between 2008 and 2013, demonstrates the non-presence of the exact concepts of "social inclusion" and "social innovation", which prove not to be central to their self-perceived role in the social and economic development of the country and/or region. Nevertheless, indirectly the underlying issues of internal inclusion are taken up in the identification of the values guiding the development of universities (e.g. diversity, openness, accessibility), while those of external inclusion are addressed as part of the rhetoric of devotion to solving diverse societal problems and improving the quality of life of the members of the society through research efforts and application of the knowledge produced by universities. While the strategies rarely identify specific marginalised or disadvantaged groups that would require special attention, they do fragmentarily tackle factors related to functional disorders, age (adulthood), ethnicity, income level, etc. The most tangible instruments for the promotion of internal social inclusiveness of universities, as indicated by the strategic documents, are those related to the promotion and development of lifelong learning and continuing education. Some other means include the development of physical infrastructure to facilitate access for disabled people and special scholarships for talented but economically disadvantaged students.

The policies and practices of universities are inevitably permeated by the present financial constraints of HEIs that force them to look for different ways in attracting the necessary funds for ensuring their primary missions of education and research. This frequently implies the secondary role attributed to the wider social mission of universities that for the most part does not provide any financial revenues. Nevertheless, the studied practices of public universities in Latvia, including regional ones, reveal that there is quite a wide spectrum of initiatives—either institutionalised or informal and ad hoc ones—that make a notable contribution to promoting social inclusiveness by addressing diverse public needs. These practices are present in the field of formal and informal adult education, community engagement, counselling, as well as social assistance, vividly demonstrating features of pure social innovation that imply non-profit-seeking activities involving new forms of interaction, measures for improving individuals' capacity for action, and quality of life. At the same time it can again be noted that many of the executed projects/initiatives that can be classified as social innovations have been initiated by international organisations and financed by foreign financial grants that demonstrate the role of international learning in advancing this field of research and practice in Latvia.

As a concluding remark it should be stressed that research on social innovation practices developed and engaged in by universities is still scarce in Latvia. More attention has been paid to studying issues regarding the accessibility of higher education, though also with wide room for further in-depth analysis of different underlying

factors. Thus social inclusiveness and social innovations in the field of higher education represent a domain with a still untapped potential as regards the development of policies, strategies, practices, as well as research thereof.

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