A new method developed by ANVUR for evaluating universities’ third mission activities in Italy

The case study provides an insider perspective on the Italian agency ANVUR, which conducts evaluations of research performance and third mission activities of Italian universities and research institutes.

**Topics covered**
- Third mission, dedicated agency, evaluations, societal impact, university survey, performance indicators

**What is ANVUR?**
- Established in 2011, ANVUR is the Italian Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes
- Evaluates universities’ teaching, research performance, & third mission activities
- Manual for the Evaluation of Third Mission – defines criteria, indicators and survey questions for evaluations
- Third mission evaluations do not affect allocation of university budgets

**Rationale**
- ANVUR was established to make more autonomous universities accountable
- Reforms increased university autonomy in the 1990s
- Follows best practice in other countries
  - Engagement and Impact Assessment (Australia)
  - Standard Evaluation Protocol (Netherlands)
  - Research Excellence Framework (UK)

**Indicators Method**
- No unique ranking
- Evaluations conducted by type of activities
- Universities & research institutes do not need to report activities in all areas
- For each of 8 areas, the Manual proposes different methodologies, criteria, indicators & evaluating questions
  - The evaluation is carried out by informed peer review, i.e. the analysis of quantitative indicators through expert judgement
  - The experts in each area adopt the most appropriate metrics

**Which knowledge transfer activities does ANVUR evaluate?**
- Public-private collaboration, often at regional/local level (intermediaries)
- Third party funding of research
- Intellectual property rights (patents, plant varieties)
- Spin-offs
- Production of public goods
- Cultural heritage
- Lifelong learning
- Clinical research and training (clinical tests, biobanks)
- Public engagement, including advice, expertise, communication of science

**Main evaluation programs conducted by ANVUR**
- 1st round of the research evaluation exercise (Evaluation of Research Quality, 2004-2010)
- 2nd round of the research evaluation exercise (Evaluation of Research Quality, VQR 2011-2014)
- National system of quality assurance of the universities (Self-Assessment, Periodic Evaluation and Accreditation, AVA)
- Reward researchers’ third mission activities without reducing their research and teaching incentives
- New survey in 2019 (SUATM)
- Develop new indicators and survey questions for institutional strategy and management
- Evaluate socio-economic impacts of third mission activities
- Integration of new existing databases held by other agencies and institutions to improve data quality, as already done with EPO database on patents and Chamber of Commerce database on spin-off companies

**Challenges**
- Adopt broad definition of third mission, i.e. not only limited to conventional technology transfer
- Include new topics such as health, cultural activities and heritage and lifelong learning
- Invest in creation and maintenance of big information systems and a robust set of indicators
- Develop evaluation model with quantitative & qualitative data (expert opinions based on informed peer review)
- Define broad targets for impacts, for example the valorization of health research entails:
  - Economic valorization
  - Clinical aspects
  - Social impact
  - Educational impact

**Implications for other countries**