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**Abstract**

In the course of the last decade, increasing political emphasis has been placed on the socio-economic contribution of German higher education institutions to their regional environment. Although a notable number of programmes have been launched to support this additional "third role", its empirical basis and determining factors remains under-researched. Against this background, we take account of regional activities at higher education institutions in Germany and investigate motivations and framework conditions responsible for their development and character. On the basis of survey data, we find that a large array of decentralised projects is already being performed by individual academics and that their motivation for doing so originates from a broad range of different factors. More precisely, we are able to demonstrate that and how the pattern of regional engagement differs according to the surveyed researchers' cognitive, organisational and institutional situatedness as well as on the opportunities that the surrounding region offers. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)