

CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES OF COOPERATION BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to contribute to a better perception of the need for cooperation of the Business community with the academy, i.e. Higher education.

Considering the results of this type of cooperation at European level, compared to the situation in Macedonia, we can see a significantly lower fluctuation of activities in relation to this type of cooperation which is realized compared to EU countries. However, despite this situation, the Macedonian academic community still shows a very strong interest in the cooperation that should be achieved between Higher education and the Business community, which is reflected in the growing interest of companies to be part of this process.

Thus, the positive attitude towards the cooperation of Higher education with the Business community, as well as the intention that exists to increase and improve this type of cooperation, can be strengthened by introducing tools and mechanisms supported by local and central government for greater involvement of Academia in Business community.

The vision of the University "St. Kliment Ohridski"- Bitola, is to be exactly such a university, which with its work confirms the same. University St. Kliment Ohridski"- Bitola, has already imposed itself as a serious partner, offering cooperation with the Business community, which enables acceleration of development processes in both the University and Society.

In that sense, the cooperation with the business community has wider dimensions and goals, due to which it will incorporate a range of issues that mean a more comprehensive approach to this issue, i.e. its connection with complementary and interdependent issues and problems related to it and synergistic effects from its implementation.

KEY WORDS: Collaboration, University, Center, Students, Business

INTRODUCTION

One of the defined strategic goals for the future development of higher education is the intensification of the business community cooperation, which imposes the essential need, the emphasis on the future directions in the development of higher education, to be placed on this type of cooperation.

This approach speaks of the intention of Higher Education to dedicate itself to this strategic issue, but also in a concrete way through the establishment of institutional mechanisms to be able to implement various forms of cooperation between the University and the business community. The real need for the development of this cooperation arises from the undoubted and emphasized common interest of both the University and the business community.

This mutual interest corresponds to the demands of modern society in which successful economies and businesses base their development of knowledge, while the quality of higher education largely depends on its ability to offer concrete preventive and exit solutions to the problems of modern social- economic reality.

Education has a unitary value, which enables individuals to reach their full potential in all areas of life. It also plays a key role in their intellectual, moral, social, creative and physical development and the promotion of basic social and civic values, such as equality, tolerance, respect, social engagement and the strengthening of social cohesion. The older we get, the more we become aware of how much the world around us is changing. Chances and problems appear and disappear, but the key to coping with change is to gain new knowledge and skills.

This process on collaboration, can be realized across the formal education system - the universities, or completely informal, through the opportunities offered by the University Career Centers and the connection with the business community.

We are in a phase of increasing IT influence, on everyday life faced with an exponential increase in the amount of knowledge, complexity and challenges. That is why the individual is most important to be adaptable and flexible. Learning faster than others is a basic premise for economic and social survival for the individual, the organization and the state.

The ability to enter the labor market and retain acquired positions means that individuals need to continually improve their knowledge and skills, as well as the ability to apply them in a different context.

Modern society cannot be imagined without cooperation based on the establishment of closer communication between higher education and the business community, which will help both parties and which has a cause-

and-effect relationship. Therefore, we say that the need for this type of cooperation is an integral part of modern education, and is one of the basic incentives to overcome barriers in communication between the business sector, the university environment and students.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Closer collaboration between universities and the business community can also help graduates gain the right skills and thinking needed in the job market, as well as skills needed for their own personal development.

There are many examples of successful collaboration between academia and industry in Europe. However, the form and extent of this cooperation varies considerably between different countries, higher education institutions and academic disciplines.

For the "St. Kliment Ohridski" University - Bitola¹, the strong ties between the business community and higher education are vital, which can and must raise an avalanche of changes that will be aimed at faster socio-economic development. Experience so far shows that, unlike ten years ago, when the university was the bearer and initiator of the establishment of cooperation with the business community, companies today, more on their own initiative, are involved in the process of education and vocational training, which has positive effects from both sides and leads to long-term partnerships.

The University is committed to projects that promote knowledge, skills, entrepreneurship and innovation through the development of new approaches to teaching and learning.

Having in mind the previous experiences in the cooperation between the "St. Kliment Ohridski" University - Bitola and the business community, it was noted that the synergy of higher education and the economy can to:

- Encourage the transfer and sharing of knowledge,
- Create long-term partnerships and (new) employment opportunities as well as
- Inspires innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity.

On the other hand, closer cooperation with companies, i.e. the business community, helps universities to develop curricula that are practically

¹ <https://uklo.edu.mk/blog/%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%82%d0%bf%d0%b8d1%88d0%b0%d0%bd-%d0%bc%d0%b5d0%bc%d0%be%d1%80d0%b0d0%bd%d0%b4d1%83d0%bc-%d0%b7d0%b0-%d1%81d0%be%d1%80d0%b0d0%b1d0%be%d1%82d0%ba%d0%b0-%d0%b8-%d1%81d0%be/>

oriented and meet the needs of companies in the interest of. At the same time, students gain relevant and practical skills and adopt a new way of thinking about the labor market. Through professional practice, students test their theoretical knowledge, deepen it, go through the process of socialization in a real environment and present themselves to employers.

MEASUREMENT OF RESULTS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

The tendency of establishing more specific cooperation of higher education with the business community is becoming more and more pronounced, especially in the last decades when the foreign investments in the Republic of Macedonia are intensifying. Such cooperation is of particular importance, and contributes to the country's sustainable economic growth, employment and prosperity. The business community would be especially pleased with this mutual cooperation, through which the promotion of innovations and innovative thinking would be approached as part of the development of capacities for future growth, which requires the development of a more qualified and competitive workforce.

Promoting cooperation between higher education and the business community is a key element in fostering economic growth in both EU member states, which is expressed through EU activities to modernize higher education, explore potential for improvement through increased cooperation, and in the aspiring countries, which through the reforms they undertake as an activity, try to adapt the socio-economic conditions in their countries, with those of the EU member states.

In the Republic of Macedonia, a series of steps have been taken to establish such cooperation.

The business community and universities are encouraged to identify problems and work together to address them. Also, according to the Law on Higher Education² from 2008, the establishment of boards for trust and cooperation with the public is envisaged, in order to establish communication with the business community, chambers of commerce and other institutions and citizens' associations in the area where the higher education activity is performed, scientific research work, as well as to

²<https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20visokoto%20obrazovanie%20NOV.pdf>

achieve publicity and responsibility in performing the activity, which is of public interest.

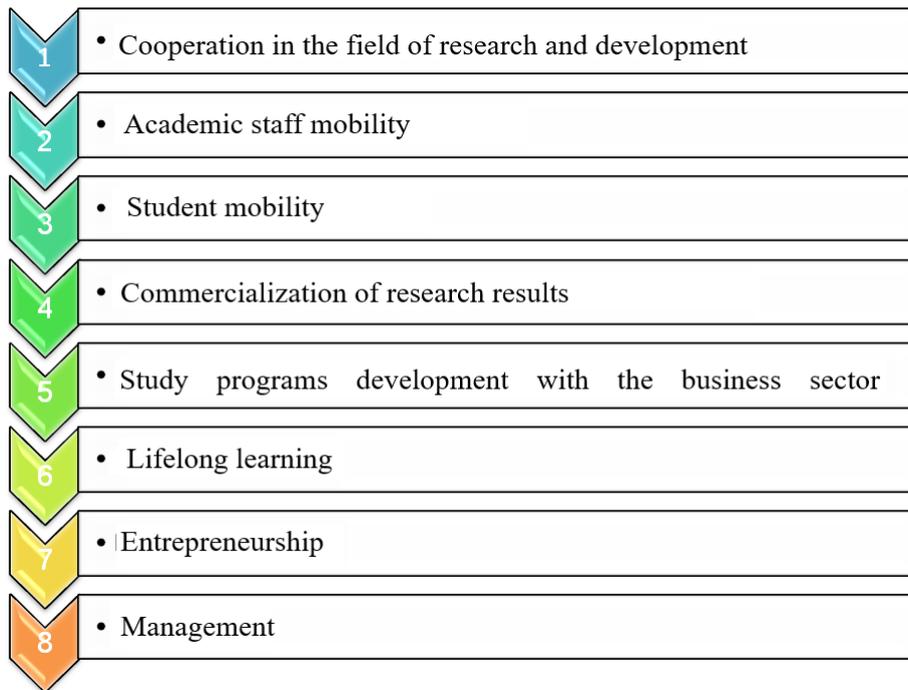
In order to achieve the expected effect and the results to be visible and useful for the society, it is necessary to focus the potential of cooperation between the higher education and the business community, on research and innovation. There are numerous examples of initiatives that seek to encourage such cooperation, however, such an approach by the business world and education has been underestimated for some time. This way of established cooperation will certainly have a positive impact on students, graduates and staff, because the exchange of knowledge and experiences from both sides can often be effectively incorporated into the work of universities and the business community, to develop the necessary skills, and set the conditions for future innovation and economic growth.

Recognition of the interest in cooperation between higher education and the business community, as well as the potential benefits to be realized through this type of cooperation, is supported by the EU through pilot projects for the creation of new multidisciplinary curricula, as well as the development of other transferable skills, through lifelong learning programs. In order for this process to justify its role, it is necessary to unite the providers of educational services and trainings, as well as professionals from the real sector, in order to design joint programs and methods, through which the skills needed to define them will be defined, are owned by the unemployed and are in demand on the labor market.

Most often, cooperation between higher education and the business community in the field of education is regulated by the signing of bilateral agreements between actors, without the involvement of public sector bodies. The focus of such collaboration varies from activity to activity, depending on the goals set.

According to the research, eight priorities for cooperation between the University and the business community have been identified:

Graph 1. Types of cooperation between the university and the business community



Source: Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre (2011) p.43

However, the main direction in which the cooperation between the university and the business community is moving, and at the same time the most practiced cooperation, is the visit of experts from the university practice and their presentation of the situation in the real sector and solving appropriate practical problems, which can be considered indirect impact on teaching and learning.

However, the growing state of the economy and the business world requires a proactive approach, which has resulted in the growth of global competition, rapid technological development and the search for the "best talent".

From the literature, the key areas in which the business community and universities can and do cooperate in the field of education can be summarized in the following key areas³

³Measuring the impact of university-business cooperation, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014

1. Curriculum design, development and delivery
2. Thinking about training development
3. Exchange and mobility programs
4. Adult education and lifelong learning
5. Entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship education

Curriculum design, development and delivery

This type of collaboration involves universities and business activities working in close partnership to adapt / improve existing or design new study programs based on the overlap between research and teaching specializations at the university and a particular industry or cluster. There is often a geographical basis for cooperation and it can be supported by local or regional economic development organizations, although there are case studies on international cooperation.

Such initiatives help to provide the strategic sectors with qualified personnel that they need in the future, which will contribute to more productive operations and will indirectly affect the economic growth of the country. The joint design of the study programs will enable profiling of the necessary staff in the economy, which will meet the specific needs of the industry. As the business community tends to be involved in making suggestions in the development of study programs, it will be possible to establish direct contact between employers and students. Such partnerships, with activities in this area, may result in expanding cooperation with the university in other areas, such as research.

Challenges⁴ in such partnerships certainly exist, and they will often be driven by different perceptions of what "success" is, as well as the application of such partnerships, because the business world will increasingly focus on practical knowledge and skills, which are achieved, while the academy on other side will want to deliver a broader program that includes a more theoretical approach.

The second challenge is the time frame for approving new or improved study programs, as universities have appropriate prescribed procedures to go through. both on the bodies of the university and on the bodies of the state, which really takes a lot of time, for which it is necessary to have an understanding of tolerance on the part of the business world, for which the set time frame is not objective.

⁴ Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Herman, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., & Rumble, M. (2010), Defining 21st Century Skills

Thinking about training development

This field of cooperation can include a number of dedicated programs to improve the competencies of employees according to market needs and the latest achievements. In this case, the programs need to be designed to meet the needs of employers (meeting current or future business needs); employees (in terms of their career advancement and professional development); and the region (by providing appropriate skills for building regional advantage in line with smart innovation strategies). For this reason, universities need to be very flexible in the way they are designed, and deliver courses that prove they are a relevant partner in the business community.

Links with the university can help raise the profile of specific departments and clusters, as they are increasingly linked to the university and its activities. These programs can have the effect of involving employees in skills and knowledge that they cannot access in any other way. Such a program will contribute to improving the links between universities and the business community, and will enable the involvement of universities in the development of specific key sectors in the economy. With this kind of cooperation, the workers become more qualified-more competitive in the market, they will be more and more appreciated by the employers. In this way, not only will a skilled workforce be provided for the local economy, but a skilled workforce will be enabled to attract new companies. This approach will also increase the cost of labor, because the industry will not want to lose the workers it has invested in.

Rapidly changing economic conditions may make it difficult to ensure the long-term development of the workforce, especially in areas with rapidly changing technology. The skills acquired by employees can become obsolete in a short period of time, for which employers do not want to invest. There is a challenge in balancing the needs of individual employers and employees with tailored solutions to the need to achieve economies of scale. While there is a need for existing assurance on the sustainability of programs, they should not lose their relevance to businesses. If the offered courses are publicly subsidized, in that case the risk of obsolescence of the knowledge acquired through trainings is reduced. Despite the existence of this type of cooperation, there is still a lack of coordination in the cooperation, especially in the area of educational offers.

Exchange and mobility programs

Through this program, knowledge exchange is offered which will be realized through visits organized by the university in cooperation with the

university student assemblies as well as the public and private sector. In some cases, a cross-sector visit may take place, but this is often an "ad-hoc" visit. Mobility programs⁵ can increase employability, especially in the case of students, by giving them a hands-on experience in the workplace. They promote knowledge transfer and "unlock" some of the university's intellectual property for the benefit of the host organization. They can also help build logical constraints, especially on academics, which in turn can create opportunities for future collaborations by breaking down barriers between the university and other sectors.

Such a program is an important tool for disseminating research from universities to local businesses and communities. Researchers who are not subject to the day-to-day business pressures of running a business can be highly skilled in helping to identify and overcome endemic problems. Universities can also work with a number of businesses in the same industry so that they can spread learning among them. On the other hand, university researchers can work in a much wider geographical area than in regional SMEs, and can therefore bring global experience and expertise to help solve local problems.

One of the most significant challenges to the success of mobility programs, especially for academics, is that career paths at universities can act as a disincentive to mobility. Because, according to the position of the universities, it is better to stay at the university and work on achieving their academic results in order to be promoted within the institution, because it is often valued more than the engagements in the real sector.

When there is insufficient alignment between research and university curricula with the needs of the local / regional economy, the program is less likely to succeed. Businesses will see students and staff as less important to their work, and those at universities will not be motivated enough to move beyond their field of interest if they are not in line with their field of research.

Universities, especially those with a worldwide reputation for research excellence, will be on the demand list of leading businesses regardless of their location. There is also the dilemma of support from universities in regions that are more conducive to cooperation, while minimizing cooperation with local industries

Therefore, the challenge is huge, how to increase the absorption capacity of small and medium enterprises for the needs of university research.

⁵ Bois-Reymond, M (2003), Study on the links between formal and non-formaleducation, Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport European YouthCentre 30, rue Pierre de Coubertin.

CONCLUSION

Collaborative activities between universities and the business community usually involve three key parties: universities, the business community and students. Such cooperation may include one university, with one business entity; one university with several business entities; and to form a network of cooperation between several universities and several business entities.

In this context, we must not forget the involvement of the public sector, i.e. institutions as well as the non-governmental sector, which often through programs and foreign donations create conditions and help and encourage this type of cooperation through funding programs. The role of such partners generally refers to the provision of financial support and the provision of conditions for facilitating the implementation of the activity. Such institutions rarely participate directly in the cooperation activity itself.

It is also suggested that cooperation in the field of education is much rarer than the level of cooperation in the field of research and development (R&D cooperation), with the exception of cooperation in student mobility. Furthermore, there is a very limited literature on assessing the benefits of cooperation and educational offer activities, with the greatest focus on research and innovation cooperation.

One of the challenges in assessing the benefits of cooperation between universities and the business community in the field of education is a completely natural question.

The benefits can usually be described as attracting students, to higher education institutions, to business participants, to academics involved and beyond. There are other challenges, including the time scale for which benefits may arise, whether they are directly or indirectly attributable to the cooperation activities undertaken and the need to distinguish between tangible and intangible outcomes.

Developing a systematic understanding of the outcomes and impacts of cooperation activities in the field of education and the means of measuring them is necessary if we are to assess potential initiatives, and monitor their evolution and current value for the purpose of adaptation and improvement. A systematic assessment of current approaches to measuring the benefits of collaborative activities in different circumstances can also serve to increase our knowledge of potential approaches in this field and to contribute to the development and better understanding of the factors that enable cooperation between higher education and the business community.

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