

OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNIVERSITY-SOCIETY INTERACTIONS IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH¹

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ABSTRACT

The topics of insufficient practical knowledge of students and insufficient cooperation of the university with society (industry, business, NGOs, government services, etc.) have been discussed for at least 30 years. Legal conditions for effective cooperation between the university and society exist, but satisfactory results still do not exist. Cooperation in scientific research can and should be a basis that can result in deeper cooperation in the educational process and better practical skills of students. As a matter of fact, ten centuries ago, the development of scientific research enabled the emergence of the first universities in Europe.

The paper will analyze the current state of UKLO in terms of cooperation between the university and the public, especially by analyzing the functioning of the Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public and the implementation of joint research, development, and application projects between the university and society.

KEYWORDS: Science, Society, Trust, Cooperation

¹ professional paper

INTRODUCTION

The topic of cooperation between universities and society is constantly actual. By society here we mean the general public, the business community, the civil society sector (NGOs), and the authorities (central, local, regional, etc.).

Research and surveys that students have little practical knowledge, that collaboration between academia and the business community is unsatisfactory have become a cliché. They are repeated in every survey and survey.

The changes in the labor market that are evident in the last few years in the Republic of North Macedonia and the lack of quality labor, especially in the technical sciences, we expect to increase the interest of mutual cooperation between universities and society.

There is a legal precondition for this, but an effort is needed on both sides to ensure that the conditions provided by the legal framework are applied in practice, but also to be upgraded and expanded.

LEGAL PROVISIONS

After the independence of the Republic of Macedonia (today the Republic of North Macedonia), the work of universities is regulated by four laws.

From 1991 to 2000 with the Law on Targeted Education (Official Gazette of SRM 16/1985).

In this law, in accordance with the then socialist society, frequently the participation of representatives of the public, especially the founder (parliament) was foreseen. In every faculty existed the faculty councils (composed of external members from political and business structures, internal members – staff of the faculties, and students) which had broad powers and gave consent not only to most of the acts of the faculties and the curricula but even to the decisions for election of professors and assistants of the teaching-scientific councils of the faculties. Of course, from today's point of view, this practice contradicts the autonomy of universities as an international academic standard.

From the aspect of the involvement of staff from the business community and society in the teaching and scientific work of the faculties, this law gives complete freedom in the regulation of this matter. Pursuant to Article 160 of the Law on Targeted Education, *"Prominent experts from the business and social sectors may participate in the performance of certain tasks from the teaching-scientific disciplines in a manner and under conditions determined by the statute of the higher education organization."*

It is clear that such a provision provides ample opportunities for the inclusion of experts from the business and social sector (without meeting the requirements for election in teaching-scientific titles) in teaching and scientific research at the faculties. This can be a powerful tool for greater practical education and a larger number of applied scientific projects, given the practical experience of experts from the business and social sectors.

After the independence of the Republic of Macedonia (today the Republic of North Macedonia) the work of the universities first time is regulated by the Law on Higher Education (Official Gazette of RM 64/2000, 49/2003, 113/2005, and 51/2007) which was in force from 2000 to 2008.

This law introduces autonomy to universities for the first time and provides fewer mechanisms for cooperation with the public. The only possibility left is the possibility for established experts to be involved in teaching.

Namely, according to Article 149 of this Law, *"Well-known scientists, experts in practice, artists, regardless of the fulfillment of the conditions determined by this law for election to the title, as specialists and experts, upon invitation, can conduct classes for certain parts of the subject, to the extent and according to the conditions determined by the statute of the higher education institution. "*

It remains unclear why the scope of teaching-scientific disciplines has been reduced only in teaching?

In our opinion, this law was one of the sparks which created a gap between faculties/ universities and the business sector.

Law on Higher Education of 2008 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No. 35/2008; 103/2008; 26/2009; 83/2009; 99/2009; 115/2010; 17/2011; 51/2011; 123/2012; 15/2013; 24/2013; 41/2014; 116/2014; 130/2014; 10/2015; 20/2015; 98/2015; 145/2015; 154/2015 and 30/2016) which was in force until 2018, takes a step towards regulating the cooperation of the university with the public by introducing a mandatory body - the Board for Cooperation and Trust with the Public.

Pursuant to Article 67 of the Law "In order to achieve cooperation and trust with the public, the business community, professional chambers and other institutions and citizens' associations in the area where the higher education activity and scientific research work is performed, as well as to realize publicity and responsibility for performing in the field of public interest, a university unit forms a faculty board for cooperation and trust with the public, i.e. a board of the higher vocational school for cooperation and trust with the public....

A person who in accordance with Article 43 of the Law on Institutions cannot be a member of the management body of an institution may not be a member of the Board for Cooperation and Trust with the Public. The composition and the manner of proposing its members are determined by the rulebook of the faculty, ie the higher vocational school.

Recommendations are adopted on the issues discussed by the Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public.

The obligation of the Board for Cooperation and Trust with the Public is to promote the existing boards of the universities, to review the activities of the board at the regular sessions of the Rectors Conference of the public universities, ie the inter-university conference, to give an opinion to the university senate regarding the study program. The University Senate is required to submit an opinion on the study program to the Accreditation and Evaluation Board prior to its approval.

The Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public of the higher education institutions have an advisory role and they include representatives of the municipality/city of Skopje where the board is established, the founder, relevant representatives of the business community or non-economy within the scope of study programs, as well as the ministry in charge. in the field of higher education.

The closer criteria and competencies of the boards for cooperation and trust with the public are prescribed by the minister in charge of higher education affairs with a bylaw. "

Also, the possibility for hiring experts from practice continues, according to Article 141 which is identical to the article of the Law of 2000 *"Affirmed scientists, experts in practice and artists, regardless of the fulfillment of the conditions set by this law for election to a title, as specialists and experts, upon invitation, can conduct classes for certain parts of the subject, to the extent and according to the conditions determined by the statute of the higher education institution."*

Although regulated, these provisions will newer be implemented, as we will see below, thus the gap between faculties/university and business community continued.

The current Law on Higher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, 82/2018) which is in force from 2018 has continued the practice of the law from 2008 and in Article 122 foresees:

"(1) To achieve cooperation and trust with the public, the business community, professional chambers, and other institutions and associations of citizens in the area in which he/she performs the higher education activity and the scientific research work or the artistic creation, as well as to realize publicity and responsibility for the performance. In the field of public interest, a university unit forms a faculty board for cooperation and trust with the public, ie a board of the higher vocational school for cooperation and trust with the public.

(2) The Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public of the higher education institutions have an advisory role and their members are representatives of the founder, relevant representatives of the business community, or the non-economy from the scope of the study programs.

(3) A member of the board for cooperation and trust with the public may not be a person who in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Institutions cannot be a member of the management body of an institution. The composition, the mandate, the manner of proposing the members of the cooperation board and their competencies are determined by the statute of the faculty, ie the higher vocational school.

(4) Recommendations shall be adopted on the issues discussed by the Board for Cooperation and Trust with the Public."

Also identical to the previous two laws is the possibility to hire experts from the practice. Article 181 *“Affirmed scientists, artists and experts from the practice, regardless of the fulfillment of the conditions determined by this law for selection in the title, as specialists and experts, by invitation, can conduct classes for certain parts of the subject, in scope and according to the conditions. determined by the statute of the higher education institution. ”*

BY-LAWS

When it comes to Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public, the current situation with a bylaw that regulates the competencies of the Board is very interesting. A by-law titled Rulebook on closer criteria and competencies of the Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public (Official Gazette of RM 148/2013), which is still in force in accordance with Article 227 of the current Law on Higher Education foresees (Article 3, 4 and 5 of the Rulebook):

“Article 3

The Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public discusses and gives opinions, proposals, and recommendations for:

- social justification of the study programs of all study cycles;*
- the content and the specific descriptors of the study programs of all study cycles;*
- the level of the latest scientific knowledge and their share in the skills acquired;*
- social justification, content, meaning, goals, and ethical dimensions of scientific research and application projects;*
- study programs for improvement;*
- vocational training programs;*
- criteria for enrollment of students in all study cycles;*
- the content and adequacy of the practical teaching of the students;*
- selection of persons in associate, teaching, teaching-scientific or scientific titles;*
- early election to the title;*
- the annual financial plans of the higher education institutions and the purposeful use of the funds in the function of the development of the higher education ie scientific research activity;*
- international cooperation;*
- cooperation with domestic and foreign economic entities and associations;*
- hiring visiting professors, well-known scientists and experts from the practice and artists of the higher education institution;*

- honorary professors and honorary doctors of science;
- organizing tribunals, ie public hearings by the higher education institution on current social issues for students and the general public, and
- other issues important for the role and contribution of the higher education institution for the socio-economic development of the society.

Article 4

The opinions, proposals, and recommendations from the hearings are prepared by the Board for Cooperation and Trust with the Public in the form of a report. The recommendations are presented in a separate section of the report.

The report from the hearing is submitted to the Senate of the university, i.e. to the bodies of the higher education institution.

Article 5

For certain issues discussed by the Board for Cooperation and Trust with the Public, if it deems important, it may invite other persons in the relevant field.”

It is clear that almost every activity of the university/faculty requires the opinion and recommendations of the professional public in the area in which the faculty operates.

We believe that such a situation is unachievable and there is a need for a new rulebook that realistically will establish foundations for cooperation between academia and society.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public at most units of UKLO (and other public universities in the country) became operational only seven years after the regulation of their work with the above-mentioned by-law, in the academic year 2020/2021.

Not at the initiative of the faculties/universities, nor to the public (business sector, NGOs, authorities, etc.), but as a result of the request of the new composition of the Accreditation Board, during the accreditation of the new study programs to submit an opinion from the Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public.

Unfortunately, the founder of the higher education institutions, the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, often remained deaf to the requests from the faculties to appoint a representative in the Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public in accordance with the Law on Higher Education. That is why they function in an incomplete composition, without representatives from the founder. An indicator that perhaps best reflects the attitude towards higher education of the politics.

The Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public can significantly encourage the cooperation of universities and the public, especially the business community in the area of scientific research, as well as education (which at higher education level are interconnected).

Now is the time to show whether the faculties are genuinely interested in hearing the opinion of the public (especially the business community) about the contents and scope of their scientific and teaching activities, or to form boards with a few eligible members who will only approve the faculties' proposals.

It is also now time to see if the public, especially the business community, which is constantly criticizing the students lack of practical knowledge, is willing to spend some of their valuable time with their own initiatives, proposals, and opinions within the Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public how to improve cooperation with faculties/university.

CONCLUSION

The revival on the real foundations of the Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public can be a game-changer in the joint scientific-research projects with the business community and involvement in the teaching processes (especially in practical teaching) at the faculties of experts from the business community.

The situation with assistants at all public higher education institutions is more than alarming. Unfortunately, in our view, there is no bright future in this regard. Especially in the technical sciences, and especially in the IT field. On the one hand, are administrative barriers for new employments, and on the other hand the low salaries. With a net salary for an assistant of just over 25,000 denars, there will certainly be no high interest in hiring high-quality students at the faculties (except in rare cases of some science

lovers), in conditions when the average net salary in the IT industry is over 70,000 denars.

However, this situation enables the involvement of experts from the business community in the teaching process (for performing practical exercises). Not because of the high honorary fees from the faculties, but because of the access to students and the provision of quality staff for their companies.

The presence of staff from the business community at the faculties could be the first step for joint scientific research. When the staff of the companies on the spot sees the capacities of the faculties (the power and knowledge of the professors and students), they will certainly not miss the chance to get relatively cheap and quality scientific and professional research and results through joint research. Which in commercial terms will certainly not be able to afford.

We believe that now with the establishment of Boards for Cooperation and Trust with the Public at every faculty of UKLO, the situation regarding greater cooperation between the university and the public is "Aleaiactaest".

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