

## **GENERAL VIEWPOINTS REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PARTENERSHIPS' BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Our research presents the importance of partnerships between universities and businesses. Nowadays forming partnerships is a precondition for accessing funds. The partnerships between universities and businesses are in favor of increasing competitiveness and business sustainability, of supporting students by the higher education institutions in which they study to find the vocation and be prepared for the integration into the labor market and the development and modernization of the technical and material base of the Universities. The need to strengthen cooperation between universities and the business environment is essential in order to support students' integration into the labor market, and it must focus on innovation in the training of adaptable human resources in a competitive economy. Our study presents a number of partnership agreements between universities and the business environment trying to underline that the better prepared students are, both theoretically and practically, the higher their chances of employment - and increasing the employability of students is by far the most important goal that Universities must pursue.*

**KEY WORDS:** *partnerships, universities, businesses, labor market, human resources, competitive economy, innovation.*

**JEL CLASIFICATION:** *K22.*

### **1. GENERAL VIEWPOINTS RELATED TO THE BENEFICIAL ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMEN**

The number of organizations forming partnerships is constantly growing. Collaboration, cooperation and teamwork, all of which underlie partnerships, are important topics, researched by those who manage organizations today, and they are

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considered successful strategies for both non-governmental and public or private organizations (Vasilache, 2015).

Subsidizers are aware of this and are increasingly forming partnerships as a precondition for accessing funds. But collaboration is promoted not only to strengthen the capacity of organizations and their level of representation. Its value is also strongly supported by Robert Putman's research on social capital, which shows that through collaboration and cooperation the social cohesion of a community is formed and developed - social capital, considered the main catalyst for economic development and effective and supportive responses to problems and disasters.

Peter Drucker, the guru of modern management, also wrote about the importance of cooperation and collaboration in the context of modern society, which tends to become more and more pluralistic, atomized in autonomous and specialized institutions and organizations.

Making predictions about the future is risky, but companies and business people who do not look to the future will be left behind in today's competitive and globalized world (Dănilă, 2013).

## **2. THE IMPACT ON STUDENTS OF THE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT**

The need to strengthen cooperation between universities and the business environment is essential in order to support students' integration into the labor market, and it must focus on innovation in the training of adaptable human resources in a competitive economy (Niță, 2017).

The relevance of concluding partnership agreements between universities and economic agents is justified in terms of adapting both the offer of higher education and the level of training of the students in accordance with the requirements of the economic environment. And this cannot be done without a good knowledge of the expectations that economic agents have from their future employees and the best way to get in touch with economic agents and find out the expectations that they have from their future employees, of which a significant share is represented by today's students, who will become tomorrow's employees, is represented by direct contact with them - including by signing Partnership Agreements between Universities and the business environment.

At the same time, the signing of such Partnership Agreements helps in addition to creating the actual partnership and facilitating direct contact between the economic agent and students and promoting study programs supported by companies relevant to economic development, as well as validating the educational offer through feedback offered by the economic environment.

The role of partnerships with economic agents is essential, on the one hand, to help students better meet the expectations that economic agents have from future employees and so that students can find their desired job as easily as possible, and, on the other hand, the role of partnerships with economic agents is essential for universities in terms of the feedback from economic agents regarding the usefulness and attractiveness of the study programs that universities offer.

Thus, from the partnership relations developed with the economic agents, the Universities can see to what extent the undergraduate study programs they offer are attractive for the labour market, i.e. graduates of these programs are received and appreciated by the economic agents, or on the contrary studies offered by universities do not seem attractive to economic agents in the sense that they do not hire graduates from these study programs.

Universities can also see from the recommendations of economic agents with whom they have partnerships that the subjects found in the curriculum could be improved in the sense of introducing new subjects that correspond to the latest trends in the field related to, for example, the latest innovations in the technical or IT field.

In a Romanian research it is considered that the cooperation between universities and the entrepreneurial environment must be intensified as part of the education, research and innovation strategies of the universities. Moreover, in the same research it is emphasized that the relationship with the private environment is, first of all, the responsibility of the academic environment. Thus, it must show a proactive and open attitude towards the private environment. The management structures of the universities, but also the teachers must address the companies' needs, looking for partnerships and offering facilities and openness to the needs of the companies (Dindire, et al, 2011).

Thus, Smart (2009, p. 307) presents various research conducted in the field and argues that "it is necessary for universities to collaborate with the regional or local business environment to develop new and innovative business". The need for research and innovation in the academic environment is also highlighted by Orsingher (Orsingher, 2006, p. 60, 126, 140), reflecting ways of implementing and obtaining quality in various European education systems, emphasizing the need to boost research.

Regarding the intensification of cooperation and communication between universities and the business environment, Elen and Verburgh (2008, p. 53, 127), in a reference paper that analyses the implications of research processes in universities according to the Bologna system, estimate that universities and their members must contribute to the innovation of society, to the dissemination of civic values, to the promotion of culture, reflecting on the need for the active commitment of universities to research as a foundation of their activity (Elen & Vanbrugh, 2009). In the same context, some authors consider that the university must manifest its role as a value creator by stimulating innovation as a result of research and acquiring the status of entrepreneurial university (Brennan & McGowan, 2006).

Kearney (Kearney, 2009, p. 11) reiterates the role of academic research as the primary source of knowledge and innovation at the national, regional or international level and highlights the key axis of knowledge: university education - innovation - research. Practically, every major innovation of the last decades is due to the research activity carried out by the university community.

The implications of good communication and collaboration between universities and the business environment are also rightly highlighted by Wright and Clarysse (2007) in *Academic Entrepreneurship in Europe*. The need for cooperation and communication between universities and other beneficiaries, including the business

environment, to meet the objectives of the Bologna system is reiterated by the European Association of Universities in the regular report Trends V: Universities shaping the European Higher Education Area (Trends, 2007).

### 3. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Within the **Politehnica University of Timișoara**, we found several partnerships with economic agents (Gontean, et al, 2019):

- *The UPT - Continental Automotive partnership, whose main objective was the financing by Continental Automotive of the creation of a laboratory in 2005 within the University, in which a total of about 300 students benefited annually from this laboratory, i.e. about 4,000 electronics students were able to learn using Continental equipment.*

- *Partnership UPT - Flextronics company (formerly Solectron) signed in 2008 - 2009, through which in its own schooling department, it organizes at its own expense training sessions in gluing SMD parts, in series of 6 - 8 students, 8 hours (training lasts a whole semester, with lists prepared in advance).*

- *Partnership UPT - Hella company, developed in the academic year 2012 - 2013, whose purpose was the creation of the Hella Laboratory.*

Hella Company has shown its willingness to contribute annually to the costs of this laboratory, similarly to Continental.

In conclusion, we can say that those partnerships, which cover the need to equip laboratories and practical skills so necessary for electronics and computer students, relieving a considerable amount of the University budget that concludes such a Partnership Agreement, are vital both for students, as well as for universities.

The **Computer Science study programs (in German) from Babeș-Bolyai University** were supported by the representatives of Porsche AG, MHP Consulting - of Porsche Company and NTT DATA Romania.

Babeș-Bolyai University, together with MHP Consulting Romania SRL, Porsche AG and EBS Romania SA signed, on March 5, 2014, a contract for the financing of the first Bachelor Degree program in Computer Science with German as a teaching language, within the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science. The agreement provided for the support of the Computer Science study program with the German language of training by financing the didactic, research activities and for the financial support of the students within this program. On Thursday, October 12, 2017, they signed the act of extension of the sponsorship agreement for the IT specialization in German.

The document provides for the continuation of the sponsorship of the Informatics specialization in German, undergraduate level, but also the financing of a new master's program in German (Advanced Informatics Systems: design, modeling, development). The collaboration between the university and the business environment thus lays the foundations for a complete program of studies in German in the field of Informatics, both at bachelor's and master's level.

So far, within the program that annually brings out a number of 75 places in the

Admission competition, 170 students have been enrolled at the bachelor level, these participating in mentoring programs, internships and courses given by teachers from Babeş Bolyai University, but also from universities in Germany and Austria, as well as specialists from partner companies.

The curriculum of the program is synchronized with similar ones of German universities, obeying all quality standards, the courses being taught by German-speaking UBB teachers, as well as computer specialists from Germany.

The involvement of the partner companies consists in financial support granted to the study program Informatics in German within the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science of Babeş-Bolyai University during 2017-2020, but also in consultancy provided by specialists in the field.

**The Faculty of Automation and Computers of the Politehnica University of Bucharest and IBM** signed in 2014 a complex collaboration agreement, which provides for collaboration for the progress of Science and Technology in order to create skills and experience by students and young researchers. In fact, IBM has signed similar agreements with other universities, such as: West University of Timișoara, Ovidius University of Constanța, ASE Bucharest, etc.

In the field of Biotechnology, **University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj Napoca, CSUD-IOSUD** signed a partnership agreement with BioDiaTech - Proplanta Research Center.

From the analysis of these partnerships, initiated and developed at the level of our country between Universities and the business environment, the following **common elements** can be highlighted:

- Partnership agreements aim at the joint development of educational projects whose main objective is the training and improvement of students separately according to the level of studies: bachelor's, master's, Ph.D programs.
- Partnership agreements aim at supporting economic agents in setting up and equipping teaching laboratories within the university.
- Partnership agreements also cover training, special research and development programs and teacher training workshops.
- Partnership agreements provide for tangible measures to maintain a permanent collaboration, such as holding regular meetings between university teachers, respectively those who have the role of coordinators of collaboration activities and specialists of the economic agents, given that an important selection criterion of economic agents consists in choosing the economic agents that manage to maintain a permanent collaboration, not only an accidental one. From this analysis of the concluded partnerships, we notice that this selection criterion is an important one, as long as the capacity of the economic agent and the university to maintain a permanent collaboration is an obligation that the parties assume by signing the Partnership Agreement.
- Furthermore, the Partnership Agreements provide for an annual review in which the Contracting Parties assess the content and objectives of the collaboration.
- Partnership agreements aim at jointly organizing training workshops, creating research teams, carrying out collaborative research projects, jointly organizing student competitions.

- Partnership agreements aim to organize internships, internships for students.
- Partnership agreements aim at regularly informing students by the economic agent of the company's job offers.
- Partnership agreements aim to take steps to ensure technology transfer and create the preconditions for technology innovation.
- Partnership agreements aim at collaborating with a view to integration into academic consortia and the submission of European-funded projects and / or national and international research grants.

The partnership agreements aim at the possibility for the economic agents to come up with suggestions and proposals, the elaboration and updating of the analytical programs, the development of the internships, the realization of double management graduation projects, on topics established and monitored jointly by both parties, the participation of the agents' representatives in the undergraduate and dissertation committees with an advisory role.

As for the **differences** found in the *partnership agreements* initiated and developed in our country between Universities and the business environment, we make the following specifications:

- There are partnership agreements through which the target group of students is very wide, covering all education cycles - bachelor's, master's, Ph.D - with activities specific to each level, but there are also partnership agreements that address only one level of education, for example the Ph.D. level, where obviously the target group is represented exclusively by doctoral students.
- With regard to the period, some Partnership Agreements are concluded for a fixed period of time (3 or 4 years), while other agreements are concluded for an indefinite period, the Agreement stipulating that it may be terminated at any time by sending a written notification to the other party one month in advance.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Presenting all these Partnership Agreements concluded by Universities with economic agents, we can conclude the following:

- Many of the Partnership Agreements concluded by Universities with economic agents are among the Universities with a technical profile. They have entered into partnerships with economic operators in particular with a view to setting up, as a result of funding from the economic operator, laboratories in which students are prepared to be able to use the machinery and technical instruments used by those companies. Knowing how some machines and technical equipment used by different companies' work, helps students who have been trained in these laboratories to have easier access to the positions put up for competition by these companies, because they can prove that they have already had access to information related to the operation and functioning of these machines.
- Furthermore, from the study of these Partnership Agreements concluded by Universities with economic agents in order to receive financing from the economic agent of some laboratories we can see that the initiative brought not only short-term but also long-term results, usually in most of the collaborations the economic

agents manifesting their willingness to contribute annually to the maintenance costs of these laboratories - thus developing a permanent collaboration.

- We could also see from the analysis of these Partnership Agreements concluded by Universities with economic agents that many of these agreements were initially concluded in order to collaborate in the field of research, creating research laboratories for Ph.D. students. And, subsequently, as a result of the strengthening of collaboration relations, many universities have created master's programs derived specifically from this collaboration and targeting the respective field. This demonstrates, on the one hand, the viability of the collaborative relations between the academic environment and the economic agents, and on the other hand the receptivity of the academic environment to the suggestions coming from the business environment, the industry regarding the creation of new study programs that meet the latest requirements on the labour market, with a modern curriculum, which takes into account the suggestions from economic operators.

Collaboration and partnerships of all kinds, intra-sectoral between non-governmental organizations or extra-sectoral with public or private organizations, are beneficial to the health and vitality of a community.

Following the study undertaken on the partnership between universities and economic agents, we can say that this collaboration between universities and the business environment, which aims to overcome any frontiers of knowledge, turns these partners into real engines of innovation and economic well-being. Visionary partnerships between business and universities accelerate innovation, drive economic development and help find solutions to social challenges.

The importance of collaboration between academia and business is very important, given the Lisbon goal of transforming the European Union into the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. In a study carried out in our country (Dindire, et al, 2011), which had in view the interpretation of applying a questionnaire to a number of 432 company managers in Argeş County between October and November 2010, it was observed that more than half of the respondents believe that universities can become the engine of regional development by improving communication and collaboration with the business environment.

The main conclusion that emerges from the study of all these models of partnerships between the academic field and the economic agents is that academic field must be aware of the complexity of the mission of the educational process, which in addition to theoretical transmission of knowledge to future specialists, must engage in partnerships with economic agents and, ultimately, with any active actor in social life, to bring to the students the contact and experience in the business environment, to create tangible benefits of this interaction in order for the students to acquire practical skills. The better prepared students are, both theoretically and practically, the higher their chances of employment - and increasing the employability of students is by far the most important goal that Universities must pursue.

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