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**THE COOPERATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES
AS A WAY TO BUILD STRONG BUSINESS
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THE COOPERATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AS A WAY TO BUILD STRONG BUSINESS AND SCIENTIFIC UNITS

Kamila Peszko, Ph.D.

University of Szczecin, Poland

kamila.peszko@wzieu.pl

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Summary

More and more frequently in the literature you can meet the described cooperation between the university and the business environment. These projects relate both to joint research, raising funds in the framework of EU grants, practices, internships for students, graduates and employees of the university, preparation of expert reports, prototypes, diagnoses, matching the educational offer to the needs of the local market, etc. However considerably less can meet with the co-operation among universities but also in this area can be indicated numerous opportunities for joint action.

Polish universities are increasingly willing to look for a partner in foreign universities to cooperation or join forces to become stronger scientific and business partner in available projects. More and more projects are created to make cooperation between centers to exchange information and realization joint ventures.

The article presents possible ways to cooperation between units, as well as present the actions taken so far. The author points to the importance of cooperation and the need for joint action between universities and business. Which may have impact on the image and position university in the national or foreign rankings. In the article the author presents a case study describing the activities of the established cooperation between public universities in the West Pomeranian Region.

Keywords: higher education, cooperation, intercollegiate cooperation, the image of the university, rankings

Introduction

The mission of higher education institutions is, among others, the "creation of links between the national academia and the global academic and intellectual communities, as well as between national and foreign companies and public institutions. The achievements of Polish scientists should have a positive impact on Poland's image around the world" (*Misja, wizja i cele strategiczne szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce w perspektywie 2020 roku* [Mission, vision and strategic objectives of higher education institutions]..., 30.10.2016).

Referring to the mentioned mission, higher education institutions should be open and strive towards the common development of higher education. Increasingly more information can be found in literature on the subject, reports, and press materials on the cooperation between higher education institutions and business, however, not many of them describe the established collaboration between institutions of higher education, which can also positively impact the image of these entities. Also, information on the cooperation opportunities is very hard to come by. The aim of this article is to show the areas of common actions that institutions can develop further and successfully implement together and to present the good practices of Polish and foreign higher education institutions. The main hypothesis posited by the author is that the cooperation of higher education institutions may be a way of building strong scientific units. The presented case study shows the opportunities for development of higher education also on the business level. The author describes them from the point of view of an organiser, observer and participant in the event.

Areas of cooperation of higher education institutions based on examples

As pointed out by K. Leja in his article, the environment of institutions of higher education is searching for new management methods that it can implement and which will contribute to the utilisation of its knowledge and resources. He paid particular attention to the necessity of seeking "dynamic interactions between competition

and cooperation of the institution", which could, in the not so distant future, establish a network of collaborating and, at the same time, competing institutions (Leja, 2011). In addition, he indicated the dynamics of interactions in cooperation, that is, the formulation of shared objectives during cooperation and competition (Leja, 2011).

The concept of **cooperation** comes from the Latin "cooperatio" (co-"together", *operari*- "operate") and is interpreted in various ways. The oldest definition indicates that **cooperation constitutes the shared work of a specific group of persons on the basis of an agreement concluded earlier** (Stępień, 2011). However, it is not always required and a verbal agreement is sufficient. Cooperation understood also as "the shared work between participants, which leads to synergies and knowledge flows, strengthening their innovative and competition potential" (Marek Białasiewicz, 2011).

An element within cooperation that K. Leja predominantly indicates is cooperation, thanks to which: the resources held are managed better, and the very process of learning and sharing knowledge is more effective and produces better results.

This kind of cooperation between institutions is being developed for several years and can constitute the basis for identifying the areas that they concern and obtaining examples of higher education institutions that implement it.

In 2008, A. Marszałek identified three kinds of cooperation which were linked to the educational offer and research projects, strategic alliances aimed at achieving a common objective, as well as the establishment of associations and partnerships.

The first kind concerned the "sharing of responsibilities in the ambit of the implementation of curricula on the faculty level or within selected aspects of research (e.g., working in project teams)", which does not require the execution of exclusive agreements by the institutions. The second type of cooperation described applies to the establishment of strategic alliances, usually based on concluded agreements. The third points to the establishment of associations or partnerships with similar strategic interests, focused around the same policy in selected areas (e.g., cooperation of the university in Oxford with colleges) (Marszałek, www.e-mentor.edu.pl).

Table 1. Areas of possible cooperation between universities

Areas of cooperation of higher education institutions	Characteristics	Examples higher education institutions
Organisational	Cooperation consists of the institutions preparing common organisational actions like, for instance, the Inauguration of the Academic Year or Regular Conferences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2013, higher education institutions in Greater Poland inaugurated the new academic year together (Poznańskie wyższe uczelnie..., 02.11.2016). • The Cyclical National Conference on Teaching Mathematics in Technical Universities organised every two years by the mathematics faculties of technical universities throughout the country. In 2016, the 17th edition of the conference was organised (XVII Ogólnopolska Konferencja Nauczania..., 02.11.2016). • In 2009. "The State Higher Vocational School (PWSZ) in Legnica and the International University of Logistics and Transport in Wrocław signed an agreement covering the performance of joint ventures, the organisation of shared scientific and academic events such as courses, conferences, seminars, symposia and lectures, student and faculty exchanges, exchanges of materials and publications" (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa..., 02.11.2016).
Promotional	Joint actions of universities aimed at promoting the region, country and their own offer within a joint action or event. The performance of joint promotional campaigns, preparation of materials containing the offer as well as joint participation in education fairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 06102016-31102016 University of Łódź, Technical University of Łódź and Medical University of Łódź in cooperation with the Town Hall, conducted a joint action encouraging studying in the city, promoting their own offers.
Teaching	Cooperation consisting of the joint development of curricula, joint course plan, consultations and assistance in the development of teaching programmes and new directions, consultations concerning scientific and research issues, mutual recommendation of courses in a given scope, as well as educational exchanges of students between the universities. Moreover, the implementation of joint courses projects it is also possible between the universities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation established in 2011 between the Polish Naval Academy in Gdynia, the Faculty of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, and the Gdynia Maritime University, the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in the scope of didactics and scientific research.

Cont. table 1

Obszary kooperacji uczelnianej	Charakterystyka	Przykład jednostek uczelnianych
Research and development	Cooperation consisting of joint performance of studies and research projects, use of research infrastructure, and exchange of experience leading to the creation of new research and development projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint work between the Universities under the Horizon 2020 programme. • Cooperation of Polish and Chinese higher education institutions conducted under programmes relating to the sharing of lecturers and researchers, joint research projects, professional development, and participation in scientific and training programmes, and conferences (Polskie uczelnie będą współpracować..., 02.11.2016).
Scientific	Facilitating cooperation within elective training opportunities and teaching work placements in other scientific institutions.	The University of Rzeszów will enable the staff at Higher Vocational Schools to have their elective training and teaching work placements there.
Business	Cooperation between the universities in the scope of acquiring partners for joint ventures under the following programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Center for Research and Development (connected with university-business cooperation), • EU programmes (science-business), • Cooperation in the scope of the development of regional business. 	Programmes of the National Center for Research and Development like RID, GEKON or CuBR. The cooperation programme between six public institutions of higher education in the Western Pomeranian Voivodship aimed at cooperation between the science and business sector

Source: own elaboration.

The breakdown proposed by the author focuses not on the manner in which agreements are concluded but on the cooperation opportunity areas between the institutions. Table 1 presents the identified areas and their particular characteristics and examples of higher education institutions in Poland that implement it.

The most commonly occurring and signalled on websites or formalised in the form of agreements is cooperation in the field of teaching and research and development. In the case of promotional actions, usually an additional partner appears in the form of the city, which connects the

higher education institutions, or a leading entity in a given project. As for organisational cooperation, it usually pertains to joint Conferences, Symposia, Seminars, etc., and their relationship relies on the branding of the information materials with the logo of the entities, or also on permanent information provided on websites. Business cooperation largely concerns the projects of the National Center for Research and Development (NCR&D) and is based on the agreements concluded under the implemented projects.

Cooperation on the regional level, the international level, as well as the global level is important for universities as it can strengthen a given scientific centre, make the entity a stronger "market player" on the education market.

The indicated areas of cooperation reveal the possibilities of combining actions and building a wider cooperation offer between universities.

Furthermore, three forms of partnership established by the interested scientific institutions can be indicated (Marszałek, www.e-mentor.edu.pl) from the point of view of the reach, based on examples of foreign universities:

- Regional dimension of partnership — this is multidimensional and flexible cooperation between universities, higher education institutions, as well as between small and medium enterprises, e.g., Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning or UAS7 — a strategic alliance of seven leading German Universities of Applied Sciences committed to excellence in teaching and research (www.uas7.org, 04.11.2016);
- International franchising networks — based on opening academic centres in other countries, e.g., popular, globally recognised universities with strong brand recognition, such as: Harvard, Cambridge, Sorbonne or Oxford may permit, on franchise principles, to the opening of academic centres under their own name in a different country;
- Global partnerships — an example of which can be the World-Wide Universities Network, or the Innovative Universities Group where partners are selected depending on the profile of activities of academic centres (similar or divergent).

The significance of the cooperation established between scientific centres and how it translates into the shaping of the image and the position in league tables is also worth considering.

Significance of cooperation in image shaping and the institution's position in academic rankings

A well defined and developed cooperation may be of significant importance to each individual higher education institution. This firstly facilitates:

- Exchange of information,
- Development of staff scientific and research skills,
- Execution of joint ventures,
- Enhancing the status of the higher education institution,
- Building entities that are structurally sound and competitive on the domestic market and internationally,
- Access to high level international project partnerships where experience counts,
- Creation of a high quality and competitive higher education institution offer attracting potential students.

All of this contributes to the image of the higher education institution that is shaped in the minds of potential and current students and scientific and business partners.

The market image is also an important factor that affects the brand choice of recipients. This is because the image is an additional quality for consumers which is difficult to quantify and elusive (Ławicki, 2005). What is more, it also constitutes an additional benefit for clients connected with satisfying the need for prestige (Opolski, 2002).

The image of higher education institutions is defined as the sum of the perceptions in many different areas. These include (Peszko, 2012):

- a) The quality of the education, which includes:
 - the qualifications and achievements of the faculty,
 - attractions and curricula that comply with modern requirements,
 - visible and efficient teaching methods,

- offered diplomas and certificates,
- accreditations and certificates held;
- b) The seat of the university:
 - geographical location,
 - accessibility in terms of transport and the attractiveness of the location,
 - the building and the campus,
 - the facilities;
- c) The academic ethos:
 - respect and reference to academic traditions,
 - running scientific research and obtaining significant research results,
 - positive intra-university relations and cooperation between all their cells;
- d) Position in the market environment:
 - place in league tables,
 - establishing contacts and collaboration with domestic and foreign institutions,
 - cooperation with city authorities, economic operators and the media,
 - the size of the institution and the number of students;
- e) Economic conditions of study:
 - tuition fees,
 - available scholarship programmes (types of scholarships available, amount, prizes);
- f) Communication with the environment:
 - visual identity system,
 - communication actions aimed at a target group,
 - media exposure;
- g) Student life:
 - among others, the activities of the academic community (associations, scientific research circles, initiatives), access to sports equipment, offer and execution of student training programmes, etc.

As can be seen, the cooperation of higher education institutions does play a role in the shaping of the institution's image. This is because the higher education institution can implement various research and development projects, can have access to modern infrastructure and provide a suitable educational offer thanks to its cooperation with other institutions.

Furthermore, the cooperation of an institution affects the position of the higher education institution in university league tables in Poland and abroad. Both national league tables like the *Perspektywy* University Ranking, as well as international ones take into account the university's potential, its scientific effectiveness, innovativeness, prestige, the internationalisation of courses and the teaching conditions. In order to achieve a high score, staff has to demonstrate substantial scientific and research experience and achievements, while the entity has to display innovativeness and a high level of development. Strong research teams, a developed infrastructure and established domestic and foreign contacts are required for this to be attained. Moreover, the rankings also take the opinions of employers into account. However, in order to secure objectivity, familiarity with the higher education institution is essential. Opinions about universities are often formed on the basis of its graduates. Thus, for institutions of higher education to show their strong points and demonstrate their potential, they increasingly undertake to cooperate with the market environment. Higher education institutions can cooperate with each other in this respect to help ensure comprehensive services to the companies in the regions and country, while at the same time building a strong business unit. Both national and international projects like, for instance, EU funds and the Horizon 2020 programme require cooperation between higher education institutions on the national and international scale, as well as cooperation between institutions of higher education and employers. Project winnings not only secure funds for the institution but also prestige and also contribute to indicators in university league tables.

One example of joint actions in the area of enhancing the business position of the higher education institution from the region is presented in the "Leap towards Innovation" case study.

"Leap towards Innovation: Business + Science"

The idea to undertake cooperation arose between higher education institutions as a result of the talks of one representative of a higher education institution from Szczecin with the Investor and Exporter

Assistance Centre (IEAC) created within the structures of the Marshal's Office, about the scientific and research potential of the institution.

The representative of five of the largest higher education institutions from the West Pomeranian region — the University of Szczecin, the West Pomeranian University of Technology, the Pomeranian Medical University, the Maritime Academy, and the Koszalin University of Technology, were invited to the first meeting which was held on 02 October 2014.

During the talks concerning the expansion of the investment offer of West Pomerania by information concerning the research and development potential of the region, it was decided that perhaps the best solution would be to present this to the entrepreneurs in the region so as to familiarise them with the opportunities and possibilities that they possess.

The first meeting was organised in Stargard Szczeciński due to the high investment potential in that city. A presentation of the new perspectives in the context of soliciting funding for innovative projects run by companies, especially in cooperation with a higher education institution was a complementary topic encouraging entrepreneurs to attend.

Picture 1. The meetings of scientists with entrepreneurs

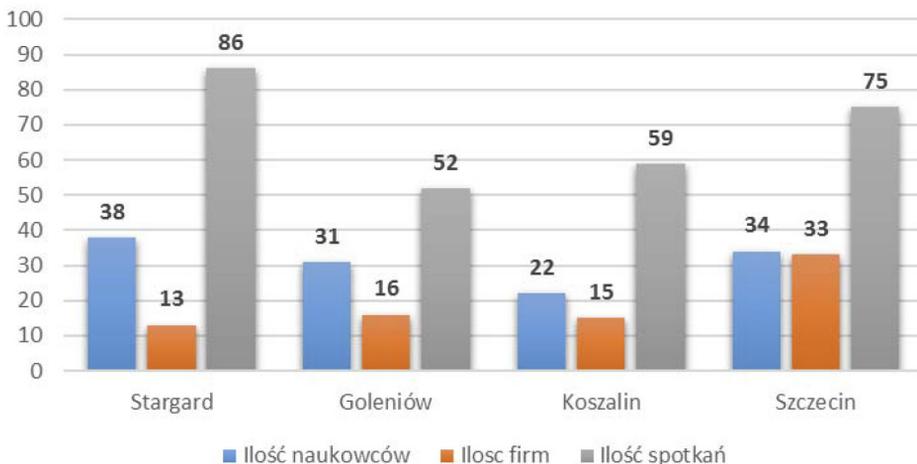


Source: Photo 1 by Dorota Idziaszczyk — CTTM. www.wzp.pl/biuro-prasowe/aktualnosci/w-stargardzie-szczecinskim-o-wspolpracy-nauki-i-biznesu.

The higher education institution shared the tasks required to be undertaken, the method of contacting and the creation of schedules. Each institution had to prepare an offer presenting the scientific and research potential of relevant Faculties/Institutes, which initially was the most difficult part due to the very broad spectrum of possibilities of scientists. A partner of the event in Stargard was in charge of inviting entrepreneurs to the meeting. The scientists and entrepreneurs that had arranged to meet had a mere 15 minutes according to the schedule. They then changed partners and began the discussion concerning a given topic from the beginning. Should they find a topic of mutual interest, individual persons scheduled another meeting.

The first exchange received a great deal of interest and provided the higher education institutions with the first partners for collaboration. Over the space of nine sessions conducted at 15 tables, a total 86 meetings were held between business representatives and researchers (B2R) (Nauka musi współpracować, www.stargard.pl). Hence, the decision of these representatives was to organise another exchange in the City of Goleniów, and after than in Koszalin. In 2016, the Academy of Art in Szczecin joined the cooperation project. The most recent meeting to date was held on 27 October 2016 in Szczecin, which promoted the following motto for the project: "Leap towards Innovation: Business + Science". Picture 2 shows the outcomes of the joint actions.

Picture 2. Outcomes of cooperation exchange meetings



Source: own elaboration.

Thanks to the established cooperation between the higher education institutions they were meant to achieve much greater gains as one strong scientific voice encouraging the world of business to enter into collaboration with the world of science.

Further events are planned as is the expansion of the areas of cooperation. The flow of information between higher education institutions with respect to similar ventures is already much better. What is more, the institutions of higher education have each become familiar with their capacity and opportunities that they have to offer, which in the situation of searching for a business partner for a project greatly facilitates further actions.

The described case study can serve as a basis for presenting a general outline of the action policy, which is comprised of several stages:

- Establishing cooperation between higher education institutions,
- Developing a model for actions with the business environment,
- Joint drawing up of the agenda and sharing of tasks,
- Direct participation in events to draw valid conclusions for the future,
- Project debriefing meetings,
- Preparing the schedule and sharing of tasks for the next event.

It is also worth mentioning within the joint actions of institutions of higher education the significant role that the city and regional authorities play, motivating them to undertake common initiatives. This, however, constitutes a separate topic of the author's deliberations.

Summary

Higher education institutions should develop cooperation between themselves more extensively.

Much more can be gained from joint actions both in image and scientific terms. Information on the cooperation successfully established should also be exposed much more as this constitutes an additional asset for them.

Wanting to become a strong and worthy of interest partner for higher education institutions, higher education institutions have to develop of model of cooperation within their country or region.

This opens possibilities for increasing interest in cooperation from foreign students and researchers and increases the chances of obtaining international projects.

This leads to attaining a better position in national and international university league tables.

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Kamila Peszko, Ph.D., University of Szczecin, Poland — Doctor of Economics at the Faculty of Management and Economics of Services (FMES), at the University of Szczecin in Poland. Member of the Polish Society of Market and Opinion Research. Advisor in the scope of marketing research and actions and a level 3 trainer. She served as to the proxy of the Dean for FMES Promotion in the years 01.2014–09.2015. She is responsible from the Faculty for cooperation with the business community. Her research interests include: marketing communication, media, generations, modern methods of promotion and marketing of higher education institutions.



Institute of Aviation
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al. Krakowska 110/114
02-256 Warsaw, Poland
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