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Serbian Journal of Management 8 (1) (2013) 117 - 130

Serbian
Journal
of
Management

Letter to Editor

RESITA NETWORK - ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION NETWORK OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES: AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION AT ACADEMIC LEVEL

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(Received 14 February 2013; accepted 20 February 2013)

Abstract

The foundation, development, activities, and wider social impact of the Academic Entrepreneurship and Innovation Network of South Eastern European Universities, or shortly RESITA Network, is presented in this paper as a positive example of successful networking in entrepreneurship and innovation at academic level.

Keywords: Academic networks; Entrepreneurship; Innovation; South Eastern Europe

1. INTRODUCTION

"The electrical light wasn't invented by means of the continuous improvement of the candle." (Siemens AG)

Continuous improvements of products, services and processes belong to the important activities of companies and other private or public institutions. Continuous improvements are necessary, but these ones

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DOI: 10.5937/sjm8-3360

alone don't suffice in order to get success within the global economic competition. Necessary conditions are increasingly innovations which really are novelties.

More and more, a successful economic development requires technological progress. Sufficient innovations become increasingly the key factor and the driving force for the future economic development of countries and regions. Therefore research, education and training, knowledge as an important source for innovation but also the fast transfer of research results into marketable products, services and processes become more important. Innovative companies, foundations of enterprises as well as Universities, research institutes and education institutions become increasingly the basis for economic progress.

In the past, the complexity of innovations increased noticeably. In the future the complexity will further increase because it is more and more necessary to work within an interdisciplinary team in order to solve the present and future tasks and problems. In addition the rise in knowledge accelerates more and more.

It is one of the consequences that individuals on their own are able less and less to provide the needed knowledge, the required skills and competence and the necessary resources in order to solve the present and future complex tasks and problems (Meier zu Köcker, 2009). Therefore cooperation between appropriate partners becomes more important in order to remain competitive. Especially the aim-oriented cooperation of different companies, small and medium sized enterprises, research institutes, universities, private service providers and public institutions can create, quickly and effectively, innovations with high potential of added value. Therefore

networking has an increasing importance for the further economic development.

More and more, cooperating and networking become necessary also for universities in order to realize creative, innovative education and research, especially international cooperation become more important increasingly. Necessary are networks between universities, based on ancient tradition of the European University, but more important become also networks of universities with companies within innovative regional clusters.

Politicians at the European level have recognized^[1] that education and training are essential to the development of today's knowledge society and economy. The EU's strategy emphasises countries working together and learning from each other.

The strategy recognised that knowledge, and the innovation it sparks, are the EU's most valuable assets, particularly in light of increasing global competition. A successful realization of the strategy requires increasingly the international cooperation of universities. Pooling of the capacities and experience of several universities can provide the participating countries and regions with access to the knowledge and the results of research not only of the University within the respective country region but also of all universities within the network (Schulte, 2010).

Therefore the European States and the European Commission^[1] strengthened co-operation in 2009 with strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.

The approach recognises that high-quality higher education and training are fundamental to Europe's success. However, in a rapidly changing world, lifelong

learning needs to be a priority – it is the key to employment, economic success and allowing people to participate fully in society.

2. NETWORKING OF UNIVERSITIES

There are different supporting programs for cooperation. For example, Tempus^[2] supports the modernization of higher education and creates an area of cooperation. Tempus supports partnerships (“Joint Projects”) between higher education institutions. They can develop, modernise and disseminate new curricula, teaching methods or materials, as well as boosting quality assurance and management of higher education institutions.

Especially the ERASMUS program is an important initiative for networking of universities. ERASMUS Academic Networks^[3] are designed to promote European cooperation and innovation in specific subject areas. They contribute to enhancing quality of teaching in higher education, defining and developing a European dimension within a given academic discipline, furthering innovation and exchanging methodologies and good practices.

According to the Bucharest Communiqué^[4] from April 2012 universities should consider the following priorities of the Bologna Process for 2010 – 2020:

1. Ensuring a quality higher education system
2. Adopting a two- or three-cycle system of study (BA, MA, PhD)
3. Promoting the mobility of students and academic and administrative staff
4. Introducing a credit system (ECTS)

for the assessment of study performance

5. The Recognition of levels: adopting a system of easily identifiable and comparable levels

6. The Active involvement of higher education institutions, teachers and students in the Bologna Process and student participation in the management of higher education

7. Promoting a European dimension in higher education

8. Promoting the attractiveness of the European higher education area

9. Lifelong learning

10. A European higher education area and a European research area – two pillars of a society based on knowledge

These priorities mean that networking and cooperation of universities shall play an important role in the future of the Bologna process and therefore also in the strategy of universities.

Academic networks can be formed between higher education institutions, faculties and/or departments in specific subject areas, and may also involve professional associations and enterprises as well as other organizations^[3].

As mentioned above, such networking presents an important part of actual European higher education system – a vivid link between different universities and different countries contributing to cooperation promotion, creating ideas, knowledge transfer, increasing exchange of good practices and innovative attitudes (Nicolaou and Birley, 2003; Lowrie and McKnight, 2004; Zilahy and Huisingh, 2009; Cadima et al., 2010; Ramirez Montoya, 2012).

The main issues academic networks tend to focus on are education process, research

activities, quality assurance, students/staff mobility, reinforcing the connection of universities with other scientific institutions, enterprises, public sector, etc. But, probably most important characteristics of academic networks deal with promoting dialogue, understanding between people and cultures, and contributing to the development of human resources and the international collaboration capacity of higher education institutions^[5].

The example of successful and prospective academic network is the Academic Entrepreneurship and Innovation Network of South Eastern European Universities (RESITA Network), which main objectives, activities and academic, scientific and social impacts are presented in this paper.

3. ABOUT THE RESITA NETWORK

The Academic Entrepreneurship and Innovation Network of South Eastern European Universities or shortly Resita Network was named according to the name of town Resita (Romania) where it was founded in 2008^[6] (Schulte, 2010). Initial participants were the Faculties from Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Austria and Germany. In 2009, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Network, while in 2010 Macedonia and Montenegro were included.

At the moment, Resita Network consists of 15 partner universities from 10 different countries from South Eastern Europe and Germany, plus one associated partner from Austria, while the Institute for European Affairs INEA in Düsseldorf (Germany)

supports the network as a cooperation partner. The partners are presented below and in Fig.1.

Partners:

Albania, University of Tirana, Faculty of Economics and Business

Bosnia and Herzegovina, University of Zenica, Entrepreneurship and Innovation Centre and Faculty of Economics; and University of East-Sarajevo, Faculty of Economics

Bulgaria, Ruse University “Angel Kanchev”, Faculty of Business and Management

Croatia, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek

Germany, University of Applied Sciences, Fachhochschule Worms, Faculty of Economics; University of Applied Sciences Trier, Umweltcampus Birkenfeld; and Aachen Institute of Applied Sciences

Macedonia, University American College, Skopje

Montenegro, University of Montenegro, Faculty of Economics Podgorica

Romania, „Eftimie Murgu“ University Resita, Faculty of Economics; The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies (ASE); and “Politehnica” University of Timisoara

Serbia, University of Belgrade, Technical Faculty in Bor

Slovenia, GEA-College of Entrepreneurship, Ljubljana

Associated partner:

Austria, University of Applied Sciences, Salzburg

Cooperation partner:

Germany, Institute for European Affairs INEA

Three declarations have been signed by the partners – Resita Declaration or Letter of Intent (2008), /given in Appendix/, Ruse Declaration (2009) /given in Appendix/ and Rector’s agreement (2009), signed by the Rectors of the universities /given in Appendix/, to forge a long-lasting network of cooperation between the universities signed by all network partners^[6].

In these declarations, Entrepreneurship and Innovation were stated as main subject fields^[6], with special aim to the development of the intercultural competence of the students, bridging of the gap between theory and practice considering the learning outcomes of the European Qualification Framework, innovations promotion and improving the spirit of innovation. Also, special attention was given to the development of innovation skills in the respective regions of the network universities. From the perspective of the regions cooperation of universities with the business as well as entrepreneurship, innovations and university-driven business

setups are particularly important to the development of regions. Pooling of capacities and experience of universities on these issues can provide the participating regions with access to the knowledge of the university network (Schulte, 2010).

From the beginning – up to nowadays, the Network functioning was enabled and funded by DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) in the frame of “Academic Reconstruction for South Eastern Europe” programme^[7].

4. MISSION AND MAIN OBJECTIVES

As was defined in the very beginning and signed in the Declarations^[6], Resita Network is created as a platform for mutual exchange of experience, cooperation between universities, but also between universities and enterprises, exploiting the opportunities and creative outcome arising from intercultural cooperation between different network partners, experiencing the economic and cultural particularities of the network countries, identifying the best practices for supporting entrepreneurship in Southeastern Europe, developing a mentality favorable for identifying opportunities for new business ideas, and developing partnership and communication between lecturers and students from different countries.

Therefore, the mission of Resita Network covers the following issues:

- long-lasting, sustainable academic network of universities in the field of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management,
- partner universities want to benefit from the experience of other network partners,



Figure 1. Resita Network and its geographical illustration

- network will create benefits for professors, lecturers, research assistants, PhD research fellows, postgraduate and undergraduate students, and

- spinning off innovations from research at universities, forging and launching start-ups, developing intrapreneurial / Corporate Entrepreneurship skills, gaining lecturing competence and new approaches, contributing towards the formation of regional clusters in the regions of the universities.

The main network objectives arise from described aims:

- to improve and complement university education with particular emphasis on practice oriented education and on enabling students to generate and manage innovation and to start their own companies

- to qualify students to:
 - acquire highly specialized knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in the fields of entrepreneurship and innovation management, as the basis for original thinking and critical awareness.

- apply knowledge, experience and interdisciplinary skills in solving complex tasks and problems in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation management

- apply personal and social skills and methods to develop new strategies for starting-up and growing businesses as well as for generating and realizing innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields of Management and Economics as well as other fields with relevance for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, for example psychology.

- solve complex and creative tasks and problems in international teams by enabling

them in the field to intercultural communication

- manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams

- to promote entrepreneurship and innovation management education through:

- coordination of course contents and integration of modules in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation management in each partner university with the objective of mutual recognition

- Summer Schools for Master students on a regular basis in Business Plan Generation, Innovation Management, Strategic Management for Entrepreneurs, Intercultural Communication and Negotiation; further themes of the networks subject area will be offered in the future – run by intercultural teams of network professors for intercultural groups of network students

- development of a Joint European Master Program „Entrepreneurship and Innovation“ (Europreneur)

- to forge a network of South-Eastern European lecturers and researchers in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation management

- to develop a strong and sustainable link between German and South-Eastern European universities and to implement a cross-cultural dialogue on entrepreneurship education between the network partners

- to support academic junior researchers and scientists in the field of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management and to enable them to make a meaningful contribution towards

development of infrastructure, economy and society in the region, and

- to launch cross-national and cross-university research projects and joint project applications by several network partners for EU funds.

5. MAIN ACTIVITIES

Based on mentioned objectives of Resita Network, the wider scope of activities has evolved through time and developed as regular events. They can be divided into two main groups: the activities at lecturer level - Summer Academies, Workshops, Mobility and Guest Lectureships, Scientific Conferences, Journal publishing, Research Projects, and the activities at student level - Summer Schools, Workshops, Mobility and Scholarships, Student Symposia, Days and Nights of Entrepreneurship. Some of the main events of will be presented here, as positive examples of the Network activities.

The Action Plans for the development of the network and definition of the activities to be undertaken in the next year are discussed and adopted at annual Summer Academies. These gatherings, usually followed by scientific meetings about current themes of entrepreneurship and innovation, for example the theme “Cluster Policy and Cluster Management” in 2012, are organized for professors of network universities and held every year in a different participant country: 2008 – Resita (Romania), 2009 - Ruse (Bulgaria), 2010 - Kladovo (Serbia), 2011 – Skopje (Macedonia) and 2012 – Tirana (Albania) (Fig.2).

Summer Schools and Workshops for the students of BSc, Msc and PhD level have been organized every year since the beginning of Network existence with the



Figure 2. The details from Summer Academies 2008-2012

topics “Business Plan” and “Innovation Management, Generating Ideas”. These meetings had different topics, different lecturers and participants from all partner universities; some of the workshops were more research oriented, while the others were organized as Case Study Workshops. During the summer schools the students must work within an international group and show ability to intercultural cooperation (Schulte, 2010). The attendees of these schools obtain certificates and award of 2 ECTS-Credits by the organizing institution and according to the formulation of objectives in the „European Qualification Framework“ (EFQ, 2008), as well as in the „Dublin Descriptors“^[8], and being based on „knowledge“ and „understanding“ skills developed in a successful qualified Bachelor studies (Brine, 2008; Van Biesen et al., 2009; Harris, 2012; Liesner, 2012; Pérez – Montoro and Tammaro, 2012), the Summer Schools have the following learning outcomes:

- skills: specialized problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.

- competences: manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams; this includes also the ability and the competence of intercultural cooperation.

- communication: students can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rational underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; this ability

includes also the intercultural communication.

As an example of that activity (photo-illustration given in Fig.3), the list of Summer Schools organized last year in the frame of Resita Network are given:

- Summer School „Strategic Management for Entrepreneurs“ by Technical Faculty Bor, University of Belgrade, Serbia, for graduates from Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Bosnia and Germany (May 2012, Bor -Serbia)

- Summer School „Intercultural Communication and Negotiation“ at the University Tirana, Albania (September 2012, Vlora-Albania)

- Summer School „Innovation Management“ at the University of Resita, Romania (October 2012, Resita-Romania), and

- Summer School “Business Plan” at the GEA College for Entrepreneurship in Ljubljana, Slovenia (October 2012, Ljubljana-Slovenia).

Further themes of entrepreneurship and Innovation are planned in 2013, for example Summer Schools “Social Entrepreneurship”, “Technology-based Entrepreneurship” and “Entrepreneurship and Business Ethics”.

Research Scholarships for junior research fellows are another important activity of Resita Network. Up to now, mostly PhD Scholarships for PhD candidates from Southeastern European countries were granted to do research stays at partner Universities in Germany (i.e., PhD candidates from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro were approved for research stays in Germany in 2012). Major objective is to offer the junior researchers the opportunity to talk to research fellows at German Universities as

well as the access to literature and data bases relevant for their research subject.

Also, Guest-Professorships conducted in previous few years were proved to be a successful model in exchange of knowledge, experiences and teaching methodologies among partner universities in core subjects of collaborating:

- Management of founding enterprises,
- Marketing of founding enterprises,
- Business Plan and Business Concept,
- Innovation Management,
- Project Management,
- Management of Growth Processes,
- Creativity and Generating Ideas,
- Sustainability Management,
- International Cooperation, and
- Entrepreneurship and ethical, social and corporate responsibility.

At the same time, the application of the „learner-centered approach” was trained in correspondence with the Bologna process (Pérez – Montoro and Tamaro, 2012). The

change from the former “teacher-centered approach” to the future-oriented “learner-centered approach” is the actual “revolution” respectively the actual vision of the Bologna Process, and it is a very demanding challenge for the lecturers.

Development, composition and writing of case studies, which take into consideration the challenges and environments of the respective selected South Eastern European Countries, present relatively new joint activity in the network since 2011, because case studies that compare the particular frame-works / environment for starting up businesses or innovation in South Eastern Europe do not yet exist. It is expected to develop further the South Eastern European Case Studies in Entrepreneurship an Innovation Management, which will be delivered and used as teaching material for adequate courses by the participating universities.

Day and Night of Entrepreneurship is a



Figure 3. The details from student Summer Schools organized in 2012

manifestation initiated and organized by Ruse University (Bulgaria) annually since 2011, as a “the road to entrepreneurship” workshop. According to the objectives of the STARTENT project^[9], master and/or PhD level students - who are in the process of or are interested in founding a start-up shall present, explain, defend and further develop their business ideas and business models in intense discussion with their academic teachers, and also with the entrepreneurs who have already founded a new company. The objective is that they get new inputs which they can integrate in their business models / concepts.

Empirical research projects focusing on (i) challenges and obstacles for innovation in South-East-Europe and (ii) innovation management and organizational culture for innovation in SMEs and family firms, but also qualitative research projects are considered to be initiated and designed based on a joint research design of professors and doctoral students from Resita Network, taking into account the country related specifications (Schulte, 2010).

Two further interesting research subjects were identified as the result of a research workshop in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in October 2012: “Failure of SME’s and consequences for the management” and “Social corporate Responsibility of Entrepreneurs”.

There were joint activities in the field of journal publication and scientific conferences organization. Since 2009, Resita Network initiated the publication of the web-journal “Entrepreneurship and Innovation” (ISSN 1314-0175)^[10] with editorial board comprising all network partners (Fig.4). Already existing journals published by Resita network participant universities (i.e.

“Serbian Journal of Management” (ISSN 1452-4864), “Analele universitatii Eftimie Murgu Resita, Fascicola II – Studii Economice Revista B+” (ISSN 1584-0972), etc.) also should be noted in this review.

Participation at the conferences organized by partners, both as communications authors or as the members in Scientific Committee, present the next way of network collaboration. After Network was found, some meetings were initiated and organized jointly by network partners (since 2011 - Symposium on Environmental and Materials Flow Management^[11] – University of Zenica, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Bosnia and Herzegovina; University of Belgrade, Technical Faculty in Bor, Serbia, and University of Applied Sciences Trier, Umweltcampus Birkenfeld).

Last two years, a lot have been done among network partner universities in development of curriculum and framework for a joint master program in Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management (Europreneur), which is still in



Figure 4. Web-journal “Entrepreneurship and Innovation”

preparation process to be submitted as a joint project. Goal of such master program should be academically based and practice-oriented qualification of young and future entrepreneurs as well as leaders. The contents are aimed at the construction, leadership and further conceptual development of businesses, especially for small and medium-sized companies, autonomous functional units of a company and subsidiaries of internationally active businesses. More, the ability for international cooperation and intercultural competence will be a core topic for the graduates.

At the end, but not the least, the communication and promotion of the network should be emphasized. From the very beginning internet site was made and supported by University Eftimie Murgu Resita (Romania)^[6], while Network also possesses its FB profile since 2011.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The paper gives a description of so-called RESITA Network - Academic Entrepreneurship and Innovation Network of South Eastern European Universities, which has been successfully functioning as a joint action of 15 universities from 10 countries since 2008.

This academic network has launched many interactions between the partners and many conjoint activities important in order to obtain success and benefits (Kenis and Provan, 2006; Mihajlović et al., 2012). These possibilities goes beyond the academic mission of Resita Network, leading to the additional options which can be of interest for further economic development in partner universities countries.

“РЕШИЦА МРЕЖА” - АКАДЕМСКА МРЕЖА ЗА ПРЕДУЗЕТНИШТВО И ИНОВАЦИЈЕ УНИВЕРЗИТЕТА ЈУГОИСТОЧНЕ ЕВРОПЕ: ПРИМЕР УСПЕШНОГ УМРЕЖАВАЊА У ОБЛАСТИ ПРЕДУЗЕТНИШТВА И ИНОВАЦИЈЕ НА АКАДЕМСКОМ НИВОУ

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Извод

У овом раду су представљени оснивање, развој, активности и шири друштвени утицај мреже за Академско Предузетништво и Иновације Универзитета Југоисточне Европе, или краће “РЕШИЦА МРЕЖЕ”. Дат је приказ позитивног примера успешног умрежавања у области предузетништва и иновација на академском нивоу.

Кључне речи: Академско умрежавање, Предузетништво, Иновација, Југоисточна Европа

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2. Participation to the submission of an EU-project proposal, in order to assure the financial support for the specific activities of the academic network.

The roles and responsibilities undertaken by each partner in the cooperation and the future project implementation will be agreed between the partners during the project submission.

The project proposal will be written by the team of the Eftimie Murgu University Resita. All the steps and specific aspects of the project proposal will be agreed upon with all the network partners.

APPENDIX

Resita Declaration (Letter of Intent) (2008) [6]

As a consequence to the debates during the Summer Academy in Resita /Romania from the 12 – 13 June in Resita, we, the undersigned of this document, declare our interest to collaborate in the following directions:

1. Establishment of an academic network within the field of Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

The main objective of this network is the improvement of students' qualification in this specific field, by implementing adequate, interactive teaching method. Another goal is the development of the intercultural cooperation abilities of the students.

The partners of this network will also support the attendance to innovations and form innovation skills in the respective regions of the universities, in order to improve the innovation climate and to increase the number of innovations.

Ruse Declaration (2009) [6]

In accordance with the principles of international academic cooperation and as a result of the discussions during the Summer Academy in Rousse/Bulgaria in June 2009, we, the undersigned of this document, declare our intention to collaborate in the following areas:

- Academic cooperation in the fields of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, in particular in the core modules listed in the attached appendix.

The main objective of this cooperation is the improvement of students' qualifications in these specific fields. Another goal is the development of the intercultural competence of the students.

- Involvement in the work program for the academic year 2009/2010, which will become part of this declaration and which shall form the basis of the academic cooperation of the network

- Involvement in the continuous improvement and development of the cooperation as well as the ongoing update and development of the work program of the network

- In the medium term, joint development and implementation of a joint program for a Master of Business Administration

- Sharing of information and advice (best practice) regarding the formation of centers of entrepreneurship and innovation and the cooperation of the individual network members

The cooperation between the partners shall thus promote innovation, improve the spirit of innovation and the development of innovation skills in the respective regions of the network universities

- Proactive use of the internet-based platform provided by Resita University / Romania as a basis for information and communication in the network

- Proactive use of the internet-based journal provided by Rouse University and participation in the editorial board of the academic journal; involvement in publications in the internet-based journal and in other media provided by members of the network

The undersigned are willing to join an academic network RESITA NET (South-Eastern-Europe Universities' Network of Entrepreneurship and Innovation) and to collaborate in a spirit of mutual trust.

Rector's agreement (2009)^[6]

In accordance with the principles of international academic cooperation of universities we, the undersigned of this document, declare our intention to support the collaboration of faculties and/or professors with the scientific field Entrepreneurship and Innovation within the bounds of possibility in the following areas:

- Mobility of guest lectures/guest professorships (sending and/or accepting)
- Mobility of students (sending and

accepting)

- Exchange of information about the scientific field

- Participating of professors or lectures in annual conferences (summer academies)

- Search for and participating in programs to support international cooperation (country programs, EU-programs)

The undersigned are willing to support within an academic network RESITA NET the collaborating in a spirit of mutual trust.