

Requirements and premises for more active non-university partners in ERASMUS Networks projects

Dan Grigorescu
University of Bucharest

The close cooperation between Universities and “Enterprises” represents a major factor in increasing the quality of Higher Education and the fulfillment of this cooperation’ great potential for social and economic development in Europe.

The importance of this cooperation was demonstrated through “cases of good practice” throughout Europe.

Among the first initiatives for strengthening the University-Enterprise cooperation: the **EUI-Net project (2004-2007)** under Erasmus Thematic Networks, followed by **EUE-Net (2007-2010)**.

In few years, especially through the auspices of the ERASMUS Program, the concept of **University-Enterprise cooperation** grew rapidly becoming throughout Europe an important part of the Higher Education Reform.

In order to sustain the University-Enterprise cooperation the European Commission opened in 2008 the **University-Business Forum** which gathers around the table of debates representatives of the academic, economic and social worlds, together with EU authorities.

Due to all these projects and initiatives a new atmosphere, favorable for University-Enterprise cooperation was created in Europe.

Erasmus Program actions to strengthen the University-Enterprise cooperation

In the last 6 years several actions favorable to the U-E cooperation were introduced in Erasmus Program:

- Extension of transversal themes in **Erasmus Networks**, following the EUI-Net project
- Inclusion of enterprises among the “project beneficiaries” in most of the subactions of the **Erasmus Multilateral Projects** (Curriculum Development, Virtual campuses)
- Co-operation between Universities and Enterprises become a special field of action under Erasmus Multilateral Projects.

Difficulties encountered in the partnership of the University- Enterprise projects

- Unbalanced/weak participation of enterprises
- Lack of a real motivation/interest for participation from the part of enterprises
- Generally, the participating enterprises are brought in the project by the universities based on previous connections among them.
- The most represented “enterprises” in the **U-E projects** are Centres of Research and IT innovation and communication, not real enterprises.

Solutions for overpassing the partnership difficulties

- Launching projects of real common interest for **universities** and **enterprises** (e.g.
 - development of entrepreneurial skills of students and employees;
 - environmental protection and promotion of green technologies ;
 - sustainable development in local or regional frame; etc
- Projects more focused on the non university partners interests.
- Stimulate the initiative and willingness of enterprises in launching projects corresponding to their own/specific aims, in which universities can effectively and efficiently contribute.

New premises for more active partnership in University-Enterprise projects

It became obvious that the social and economic progress in the societies cannot be achieved without a strong partnership involving well motivated parts, with well defined tasks, responsibilities and benefits.

The European Commission continues the efforts for strengthening the role of enterprises (particularly of small ones) in societies and the E-U cooperation in projects.

Among the new EC initiatives :

the issue in parallel with the **Erasmus University Charter** of the **European Charter for Small Enterprises** in which the small enterprises are regarded as *the backbone of the European economy and a key source of jobs and a breeding ground for business ideas, as well as the main driver for innovation and employment in Europe.*

The recommended **Lines for action** in the recently issued **Charter for Small Enterprises** have in the first line *Education and training for entrepreneurship*, stating that :
“General knowledge about business and entrepreneurship needs to be taught at all school levels ,while Specific business-related modules should be made an essential ingredient of education schemes at secondary level and at colleges and universities”.

European Charter for Small Enterprises -2009 good practice selection presents six domains in which small enterprises coordinate or participate in successful projects :

1. Cash flow for business growth - Incentives for reinvesting profits
2. Easier access to public procurement
3. Business dynamics: easier bankruptcy procedures and business transfers
4. Fostering creativity in entrepreneurship
5. Fostering Women's entrepreneurship
6. Fostering eco-innovation and energy efficiency in SMEs.

Comments –in all domains universities can contribute, particularly in 4,5 and 6 listed domains.

A Romanian case of good practice in creating an efficient university/non-university project partnership :

The Hateg Country dinosaurs Geopark – a Master project aiming at Sustainable development of a region in Transylvania.

Main project objectives

- Conservancy and valorization of the Nature and Cultural heritages of the region through education and tourism
- Development of sustainable agriculture in the region
- Reinforce the cultural/folkloric regional traditions
- Enhance ecological education, in primary and secondary schools from the region
- Offer the possibility of professional reconversion through ODL organized by the partner universities.

Expected impact of the project

Nature conservation

- Improvement of the geological sites organization and management in order to ensure their protection and valorization through tourism and education
- Promotion of interdisciplinarity in geological researches and practical methods of geoconservation
- Raise the awareness on the role that Geodiversity and Biodiversity, tackled together in an integrated system of conservation and valorization, can play in sustainable development of a region.

Economy

- Funds raising from tourism (pensions and services) and from connected activities (handicrafts, microproduction of merchantable objects related to the Geopark)
- Engender new work positions, especially in connection with site protection and development of the tourism in the region

Social and cultural

- Revitalization of the ethnologic and cultural identity of the Hateg Country
- Ensure the possibility of professional training / reconversion through courses offered by the university consortium involved in the project
- Strengthening the social cohesion among local communities, which are linked by a common interest in raising the socio-economic standard of the region.

Partnership

- **Inter-University consortium**
 - University of Bucharest
 - University of Petrosani
 - University of Architecture from Bucharest
 - University of Agriculture from Timisoara
 - University “Babes-Bolyai” from Cluj
- **Inter-Communal Association for sustaining the Geopark**
 - Mayors of all the 11 localities from the Geopark area
 - Representatives of the County Council Hunedoara
 - Representatives of Universities from Bucharest and Petrosani
- **Enterprises**
 - SC Hidroconstructia Raul mare
 - SC Electrica, Hateg
 - Nabis SRL, Hateg
- **Local Communities**
 - Professors, teachers, priests, farmers.

Proposals for the new EUE-Net project

Well defined objectives of common interest for the partner universities and enterprises; objectives to be decided following common debates

- **Involvement of well motivated enterprises towards the project objectives**
- **Concrete and feasible responsibilities for all the partners**
- **Establishment of specific working groups around specific pillars of the project** (e.g. Development of entrepreneurship skills with special emphasis on women's entrepreneurship, Nature protection and promotion of Green technologies, Sustainable development of the regions, etc)

Comment Practical placement for students should remain a main objective of the project but organized within a working groups which involves well motivated enterprises for this issue.

- **Encourage the enterprise' initiatives in defining the project objectives and activities.**