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## Cooperation of universities as an element of support for innovation in regions

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## COOPERATION OF UNIVERSITIES AS AN ELEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR INNOVATION IN REGIONS

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### Introduction

The transfer of knowledge and technology from the scientific environment to the industry is most beneficial for the creation of a good atmosphere for the development of science. The socio-economic growth of Poland opens new opportunities to us and allows us to think what could be done to help Polish science keep up with the best.

Even though in the recent years there have been initiatives aimed at stimulating positive changes in this area, the scale of transfer of knowledge from science to business is still unsatisfactory. Large number and small size of institutions as well as the failure to adapt scientific offer to the needs of the market are behind the fact that still too few scientific inventions support the development of companies. A barrier which limits the effective use of scientific achievements, which is very often missed out, is insufficient utilization of marketing tools supporting scientific and didactic activities of universities.

In the first part of the text the experiences from cooperation between Poznań-based universities will be presented. The second part contains a record of activities of the University of Arts in Poznań in the context of promotional activities taken up together with other universities. The example of the University of Arts in Poznań shows that universities in Poznań can efficiently take advantage of marketing tools for the promotion of their scientific achievements and didactic offer.

### Promotion of scientific – research institutions in Poland

The research on promotional practices of scientific and research institutions in Poland<sup>1</sup> carried out in 2007 on the order of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, showed that in the scientific environment activities aimed at promotion of scientific and didactic potential are regarded as significant. However, there is quite a large discrepancy between the declared significance of such activities and the measures taken in reality.

A significant share of Polish universities neglect promotional activities. Due to the lack of general strategy of promotion defining activities which are supposed to create a coherent image of a university,

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<sup>1</sup> „Raport z drugiego etapu badań” within the project *Promocja nauki* (2007). Research carried out on the order of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

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actions are taken occasionally – in response to current needs in the area of image. As a result units responsible for promotion don't have appropriate tools and means at their disposal that could be used to shape more complex marketing activities.

An important deficiency identified in the scientific environment is the limited access to the resource bases of scientific-research institutions. If scientific units want to strive to achieve the position of entities that could start commercial cooperation with business, first of all, they need to clearly define their offers. It is important to highlight the areas and scope of cooperation. Thanks to this, those interested in cooperation with a scientific unit receive a clear message what business or technological needs can be satisfied. What may be surprising is the fact that despite unquestionable potential and significant scientific achievements, scientific centres are still unwilling to take advantage of their successes in the promotional aspect. Apart from the lack of promotional strategies, this often results from the unwillingness of scientists themselves to inform the environment about their achievements and can also be the result of legal and formal limitations within the institutions themselves.

The activities promoting the potential of a scientific institution should be carried out both within and outside the organization. Thanks to this the environment is informed about what scientific and didactic activities are being carried out. Promotion outside serves the purposes of building the image, informing and has utility functions (it enables, among others, implementations). The promotion of actions taken within the organization can be helpful in using the potential of other units. Thanks to this universities can create more complex and interdisciplinary teams, which can provide offers even more attractive for the environment.

One of the reasons for the weakness of universities in the area of promotional activities may be the quality of mechanisms of communication. Generally, channels of communication should be as accessible and transparent as possible. However, it turns out that sometimes internal and external communication fails. Barriers in communication result from, among others, insufficient number of 'contact points' at universities. A person or institution interested in cooperation with a university very often doesn't know where to go to obtain information about the possibilities of cooperation.

Unquestionably, another factor which has a negative impact on the promotional potential of universities are formal and legal limitations on starting cooperation of scientific centres with the business sector. The basic cause of this state of affairs is complex. It is worth bearing in mind that due to complicated and ambiguous rules of starting cooperation with external entities, the transfer of scientific achievements from science to business often takes place without universities. Scientists and interested entrepreneurs are aware of the limitations and often choose less complicated and undoubtedly financially more beneficial forms of direct cooperation. As a result, many scientific achievements implemented outside universities cannot be used for the promotion of universities.

The last, but not less important, element which has a negative impact on the marketing potential of a university are the competences of scientific employees themselves in this area. Due to the lack of understanding of the need for promotional activities, many scientific achievements with a promotional

potential are not promoted sufficiently.

In 2006 the City of Poznań in cooperation with the Poznań Science and Technology Park, started the project titled „Preparation of a model of support for academic entrepreneurship in Wielkopolska”<sup>2</sup> (Action 2.6 of EU Structural Funds in Poland). The goal of the project was to conduct research on academic entrepreneurship in the region, diagnosing barriers in development and creating a set of instruments of support recommended for practical application.

A report prepared in course of the project highlighted very significant barriers limiting the effective utilization of the potential of local universities. Despite the fact that the project focused on the issues of academic entrepreneurship, it is worth paying attention to some of the conclusions. In the report one of the highlighted issues was the entrepreneurship of universities themselves. Here entrepreneurship was defined as the ability of universities to obtain external sources of financing. The knowledge of the market and the ability to respond to the diagnosed needs of local entrepreneurs and institutions turned out to be insufficient. Thus, the level of entrepreneurship of universities also indirectly defined the level of progress of universities in the area of applying effective marketing techniques.

### **Activities for the promotion and cooperation of scientific centres taken up by the City of Poznań and the Poznań-based universities**

Poznań is a major scientific and research center in Poland. Here scientific research is conducted not only by higher education institutions, but also by almost 50 research and scientific institutions. This substantial potential can and should play a major role in the development of modern and competitive economy of Wielkopolska region. Taking into consideration the scientific – research potential, the authorities of the City of Poznań decided that supporting the process of transfer of knowledge and technology from universities and scientific units to business will be one of key goals included in the new „Strategy of the City of Poznań till the year 2030”. In the document defining the most important issues in the development of the city, the focus is on support and promotion of local scientific centres.

One of the tools for the implementation of the goals of the city’s strategy is the Program of Support for Innovative Projects (PWPI). The program is a joint initiative of the city of Poznań and seven Poznań-based public universities – University School of Physical Education in Poznań, University of Arts in Poznań, Poznań University of Economics, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań University of Medical Sciences and Poznań University of Life Sciences.

The goal of the Program of Support for Innovative Projects is strengthening the ties between the research and development (R&D) sphere and business in Wielkopolska through the promotion of universities as a source of solutions based on knowledge addressed to entrepreneurs, supporting the cooperation of science with business, supporting the development of innovative academic entrepreneurship and the promotion of innovative projects in the environment of investors. The Program of Support for Innovative

<sup>2</sup> „Opracowanie modelu wspierania przedsiębiorczości akademickiej w Wielkopolsce - Raporty z badań przeprowadzonych w ramach projektu” (2007). City of Poznań and the Foundation of Adam Mickiewicz University – Poznań Science and Technology Park.

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projects is a venture promoting not only the achievements and potential of science in Wielkopolska, but above all, its cooperation with business. An unquestionable advantage of the PWPI program are activities carried out jointly by Poznań's universities. Broad cooperation of the academic environment of Poznań constitutes an opportunity for exchange of knowledge and experiences and allows carrying out activities on a large scale, targeted at a major group of recipients.

In course of the Program of Support for Innovative Projects both projects financed by the budget of the City of Poznań and projects co-financed with EU funds are carried out. Currently, five projects are being carried out.

### **Intercollegiate Network of Promoters of Academic Entrepreneurship (MSPPA)**

Intercollegiate Network of Promoters of Academic Entrepreneurship (MSPPA) is an instrument of support for cooperation of scientists and entrepreneurs interested in the commercialization of scientific achievements. A necessary condition for starting cooperation is the possibility of holding a meeting of representatives of science and business. However, as it turns out, by now at universities there has been a shortage of people responsible for contacts with the business sector. The MSPPA network is a response to this need. The core of activities in course of MSPPA is the activity of promoters of academic entrepreneurship – people who are supposed to establish contact with scientists in order to collect and publish information about the results of research works and expert services that could draw the interest of entrepreneurs. Promoter is also a person who accompanies entrepreneurs and scientists in the process of commercialization of an offered solution or service.

Seven public universities from Poznań are involved in the project. At every university there is a promoter of academic entrepreneurship appointed to this position by the dean of a particular university. The following universities are participating in the project: Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań University of Economics, Poznań University of Life Sciences, University School of Physical Education in Poznań, University of Arts and the Poznań University of Technology. The list is not closed. It is planned that in the future the Network will also include scientific-research institutions and private universities.

In course of the project much attention was paid to substantial support for people involved in the project. From the very start the project is supported by experienced and competent patent agents, who provide substantial support to promoters of academic entrepreneurship.

The MSPPA project is closely associated with Wielkopolska Innovation Platform (WPI). The effects of work of promoters of academic entrepreneurship in form of offers of cooperation of universities with the business sector are posted in a database available on the website of Wielkopolska Innovation Platform.

### **Wielkopolska Innovation Platform (WPI)**

The functioning of the website of Wielkopolska Innovation Platform was initiated by the project titled „Establishment of the Wielkopolska Innovation Platform” (Action 2.6 of EU Structural Funds in Poland). Following the conclusion of the project and its financing with funds from the EU, the decision was made

that continuing the project would be beneficial. The decision was made that the project in a slightly altered form would be financed with money from the budget of the City of Poznań.

Wielkopolska Innovation Platform (WPI) is a website devoted to the subject of innovation, which offers a database of offers of Poznań's universities targeted at entrepreneurs. The presented offers are grouped in such categories as: measuring services, research services and results of research works. The search engine available on the website allows us to quickly find offers satisfying the needs of an entrepreneur or an institution. Thanks to the website new technological solutions worked out by Poznań's scientists can find their way to practical application in the economy. The website is also a source of information about innovations and transfer of technology, financing innovative investments or legal aspects of cooperation of scientific institutions with entrepreneurs. The website also presents latest information about specialist trainings and conferences.

### **„Scientist in business – apprenticeship of scientific employees in companies”**

The project „Scientist in business – apprenticeship of scientific employees in companies” is co-financed with funds from the Human Capital Operational Program within Priority VIII - Sub-action 8.2. support for cooperation of the sphere of science with companies. The project covers the organization of apprenticeship programs and practical trainings targeted at scientific employees. The goal of the apprenticeship programs is the development of cooperation and boosting the transfer of knowledge and strengthening ties between scientific centres in Wielkopolska and enterprises. Thanks to apprenticeship programs and trainings, scientists learn about the ways of starting cooperation with companies and what rules this cooperation should be based on. Moreover, scientists get the chance to learn about the characteristics of production processes, the structure and culture of organization of companies. The conducted project is supposed to have a positive impact on the motivation of the participants to commercialize their scientific achievements and contribute to raising the awareness of benefits associated with the cooperation of the scientific environment with enterprises.

Without any doubt the project also serves the purpose of shaping the image of employees of research and scientific institutions. Scientific employees participating in the project contribute to the promotion of local science by taking part in apprenticeship programs in companies. Companies participating in the project get the opportunity to get to know representatives of science, who thanks to their knowledge and scientific ambition can in the future support the development of the local economy.

### **„First step towards own business”**

Project co-financed with funds from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, a part of the venture „Creator of innovation. Support for innovative academic entrepreneurship”, is carried out in partnership with the Poznań Science and Technology Park. The project is targeted above all at enterprising students and scientific employees. The authors of business ideas inspired by knowledge and experience gained at universities have a chance to present their ideas to investors from the market of *venture capital*.

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The project can open to representatives of the scientific environment the door to long-term cooperation with investors. Thanks to close cooperation with representatives of the venture capital market, the participants of the project have a unique opportunity to establish direct business relations. Institutions with *adequate capital* and *renown guarantee* not only financial stability, but also substantial support. Activities promoting the project, supported by promoters of academic entrepreneurship enabled reaching a broad group of interested entities.

### **Poznań Days of Academic Entrepreneurship**

The organizers of Poznań Days of Academic Entrepreneurship are, along with the City of Poznań: InQbator of the Poznań Science and Technology Park of the Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation, University Center of Innovation and Technology Transfer of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań Academic Entrepreneurship Incubator.

The goal of the annual event titled Poznań Days of Academic Entrepreneurship is creating closer ties between the world of science and business. The cooperation with Poznań's higher education institutions during the event enables preparing a complex offer targeted at Poznań's academic environment. Universities participating in the venture get a chance to present the effects of their activities and the jointly taken actions boost the strength of promotional influence. The participation of promoters of academic entrepreneurship (MSPPA) and people conducting urban projects gradually contributes to a change in the direction of perception of universities as modern entities focused on development and cooperation.

### **The Experiences of University of Arts in Poznań in the area of promotion and intercollegiate cooperation**

The issue viewed from the perspective of the University of Arts in Poznań may be slightly subjective in character above all due to the characteristics of scientific activity which constitutes the didactic foundation of the University. The University's activities are strictly creative in character and any kind of research work is always no more than an analytical introduction to the synthesis of conclusions, which is achieved mainly thanks to the intuition of the work's author. Perhaps, from the point of view of detailed methodology of activities, the similarities between artists, sculptors or designers end at this point. However, the fact that all of them remain artists has a substantial impact on the model of the offer they introduce to the market. I am not talking here about the problem of „commercialism” or „consumption” - words which in the world of real humanists sound ambivalent at best. The main issue here is the language of the dialogue between educators and graduates of artistic universities and the broadest possible group of recipients.

In further part of the work the unique characteristics of the design faculties of the University of Arts in Poznań will be discussed, as in the recent years these faculties draw the attention of many entities due to the fact that the words: design and innovation currently constitute an easy gateway to a series of financing sources, especially to EU funds. The gateway is especially easy, as both design and innovation

are not clearly defined terms and they allow us to use a broad spectrum of interpretations.

Designers should be happy about the fact that the word design has gained a substantial power over the recent years. design should accompany every branch of the economy. For this reason it is so important to promote the scientific units protecting the ideas behind good design. This has a huge impact on the position of young, ever more comprehensively educated designers starting their professional careers. This in turn affects the quality of life of every citizen.

Treating design as a necessary catalyst for reactions taking place in the contemporary business leads to a simple conclusion, which partially constitutes a response to the question why the subject of intercollegiate cooperation as an element of support for innovation in the region is discussed by a representative of the University of Arts. The point is that design itself as a pure idea has no *raison d'être*. This is what makes it different from a verse of a poem written on a matchbox. Design to prove its value has to take the shape of a product and enter the market – it becomes tangible in dialogue with entities responsible for its materialization. Nowadays, designers who apart from designing deal with production, promotion and sale of their solutions are a marginal group. However, even they need an organized background supporting their activities.

Unfortunately, when we look at this issue from another side, many branches of the industry are doing quite well without design. A good example of that may be the esthetic value of Polish speed cameras (apart from a few well-designed speed cameras functioning on the territory of Pomorskie voivodship). Polish designers are still the element which is easiest to eliminate in the process of creating a new product. This hurts not only our eyes, but at the end of the day in many cases also our pockets.

At the beginning of 2011 promoters of academic entrepreneurship gathered in the Program of Support for Innovative Projects carried out an experiment which was supposed to show the network of mutual relations between various areas of science represented by seven universities located in Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań University of Economics, Poznań University of Life Sciences, Poznań University of Medical Sciences, Poznań University of Technology, University School of Physical Education in Poznan and the University of Arts. The idea was based on detailed presentation of birth, market debut and further life of a fictional product through description of groups of professionals responsible for every stage of the above process. In order to look into the matter from a possibly broadest perspective, the initial characteristics of the product were defined: it should be popular, but still it should refer to a particular model of utilization, which sets out particular utility requirements from the very start. Moreover, the market needs to exert pressure on it in terms of price, visual quality, level of competition, ecological aspects etc. In association with the fact that one of the most developed branches of Wielkopolska's economy is manufacturing furniture, an office chair was chosen as the subject of a case study. With the participation of professor Jerzy Smardzewski from the University of Life Sciences and dr. Piotr Ratajczyk from the University of Economics, taking into consideration the suggestions of promoters of academic entrepreneurship from other above-mentioned universities a presentation was prepared. The presentation in form of an animated film enriched with photographs had its premiere on April 7, 2011 during the Poznań Days of Entrepreneurship at the Poznań International Fair.



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Title of the presentation: „Design: the symbiosis of creativity and science” emphasized the character of relations between the world of creators and scientists showing clearly that in the contemporary world there is no place for a badly designed product. In the introductory speech Piotr Ratajczyk, Ph.D. emphasized that global economic development should follow the idea of total design, which requires from designers above all comprehensive view of product as a factor influencing both ecological and social balance.

An exceptionally significant gain derived from the above presentation was the assignment of duties to professionals representing all Poznań-based universities in the process of creating a perfect office chair. The film [http://www.wpi.poznan.pl/galeria/2\\_4.html](http://www.wpi.poznan.pl/galeria/2_4.html) is available in full at the website of Wielkopolska Innovation Platform conducted within the framework of Program of Support for Innovative Projects.

Implementing the above 16-stage formula into practice will take years. However, what is encouraging and definitely optimistic is the fact that in a way in response to the declaration the Department of Artistic Furniture and the Department of Furniture of the University of Life Sciences got much closer to each other. Plans for the establishment of an intercollegiate faculty educating designers and process engineers in one is the first initiative in Poland which involves combining scientific and creative experiences. This initiative is supposed to form a graduate expected by the dynamically developing Polish furniture industry. In times of growing specialization, which is gradually threatening full comprehension of global problems, there is a need for versatile people, who have both detailed and general knowledge, shaping the awareness of the context of a particular solution.

Exceptionally positive results of the cooperation of the University of Arts with the Poznań University of Technology, within the Architecture and Urban Planning Department of the Architecture and Design Faculty of Poznań University of Arts, started in 2003, are good evidence of the correctness of the above claim. Students educated by the two universities not only have a broader view of the world resulting from local conditions, but can also take advantage of the whole pool of participating in courses abroad by means of such programs as Erasmus or Socrates and others. The students can obtain the title of engineer and master of arts at the same time, which definitely facilitates their debut in the profession of a designer.

The Department of Architecture and Urban Planning educates students who achieve success around the whole world. It is worth mentioning here, for example, Agnieszka Nowak, Hugon Kowalski and Ryszard Rychlicki, who till recently worked in teams, and the distinctions they received for their projects submitted to London Bridge or Toki Fashion Museum contests.

## **Conclusion**

Experiences obtained during the implementation of the presented offers confirm the conviction that despite many successes in the area of intercollegiate cooperation, many aspects of functioning of scientific centres still require improvement. The model of supporting science conducted by the City of Poznań also requires further improvement. Good will of the authorities of both the City and the Poznań-based universities, allows us to look into the future of local science with hope and optimism. Undoubtedly,

the partnership established by local authorities and the management of local universities, proves the value of projects under the Program of Support for Innovative Projects. Thanks to cooperation it is possible to achieve results, which it would be impossible to achieve individually.

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### **Websites**

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