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The Artist – University – Company: Creating Business Relationships Network

Summary

The purpose of the article is to investigate how the Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz creates business relationships with companies and artists. The article enumerates various aspects of the positive impact of those business relationships on the Academy. The study is divided into theoretical and practical parts. The theoretical part describes the reasons for dealing with the issue and the essence of the network of business relationships as well as the reasons for the development of the network, including motivations for networking, determinants of cooperation between the university and other entities. The practical part of the article aims to present the results of research studies conducted at the Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz between 2007 and 2017 at the two faculties: the Faculty of Industrial and Interior Design, and the Faculty of Sculpture and Interactive Actions.

Key words: network, business relationships, university, artist, company.

JEL codes: I23, I25, Z11

Introduction

The number of reasons for which organizations, including universities, more frequently operate in networks or form them is increasing. One should enumerate organizational dependence, narrow specialization, the need to reduce costs, improvement of the quality of education, the need to learn, and individual needs of network participants. With reference to higher education this need results from the Higher Education Act (Act 2005, Art. 2, 9a, 11, 168a; Act 2014, Art. 2 (18ea)), which, among others, imposes a requirement to conduct student traineeships. Nevertheless, it seems that the main reason is a more frequent, conscious and strategic cooperation, also practiced by universities in order to function effectively. The purpose of the article is to investigate how the Strzemiński Academy of Art Łódź creates business relationships with companies and artists. There is a research gap in Poland regarding this issue, especially information about art schools is poor, which, in the authors' opinion, justifies exploration of the topic.

Motivations for networking

Plenty of factors influence the decision on creating a relationship network (Czakon, Kawa 2018; Caban-Piaskowska 2016).

The research on the trend of interorganizational phenomena, in its basic assumption, expresses the theory of organizational dependence (Hakansson, Snehota 2006). Dependence is more than a pressure of the environment to adapt to it, and more than resource dependence (Salancik, Pfeffer 1978). The dependence of organizations connected to other organizations is noticeable in the decision-making process and its implementation. The effect of such dependence refers to the interorganizational space (Czakov, Klimas 2014). It is similar in reference to the activities of the universities that, in many instances, in order to realize their own activities, use the resources of other people or organizations (Clark 2004). An example of its usage is the Triple Helix model where interactions of participants, university-industry-government, are the key to innovation in increasingly knowledge-based societies (Etzkowitz 2008).

Higher education in the cooperation network

In the preface to the European Commission report: Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth wrote: *education is the key to a better future, and such investment will both speed up the process of recovery and equip people and countries with the competences to prosper in a post-crisis world*. An essential role within the educational system has been ascribed to higher education, as an element, which takes advantage of the wealth of applicants for admission to the universities and transforms it into the potential of the graduates to perform certain professional and social roles.

From the point of view of the society and economy, the education system holds three major functions (Buchner-Jeziorska 2003, s. 54):

- Educating for the needs of the labour market,
- Enhancing the modernization potential of the society,
- Forming the social structure.

The character, scope and the manner of performing these functions are certainly historically and politically determined, both in the international dimension, as well as within the evolution of the university model inside the particular country (Piotrowska-Piątek 2017).

In order to accomplish the elementary assignments of the higher education, meaning teaching as well as conducting research and development works, relationships between the university and its surroundings become important (Clark 1998; 2004), both in the social and economic spaces. Emphasizing the importance of the orientation of the university activities in the field of education and conducting research for the needs of society and economy, especially in the regional dimension (Niemczyk, Stańczyk 2014), is reflected in the concept of the so-called third mission of the university (Piotrowska-Piątek 2017), or Triple Helix (Etzkowitz 2008; Cai 2014). An extremely strong connection exists between undertaking the university-artist-business cooperation and effective functioning of universities, what is reflected in the number of candidates applying to study, as well as achievements of the students during their stay at University.

Determinants of networking at an art university – case study

In order to verify the hypothesis that one of the main causes of effective functioning of the university is building the network of business relationships with companies and artists, it was decided to collect data by conducting a participatory observation, which was supplemented with the analysis of documents and reports as well as interviews with employees, at the two faculties of the Strzemiński Academy of Art Łódź: the Faculty of Industrial and Interior Design, and the Faculty of Sculpture and Interactive Actions. Researches were conducted between the years 2007 and 2017.

A case study (Yin 2014), as a research method, was used to analyse data.

Sculpture in a practical profile – case study

In the researched period the Strzemiński Academy of Art Łódź, at the Faculty of Sculpture and Interactive Actions (FS&IA), conducted full-time studies in the field of sculpture in a practical profile. Studies did not hold the character of dual studies. Cooperation with outside entities and forming cooperation relationships made the Faculty an element of the network with an extremely wide and differentiated character.

Case study – relations network between FS&IA and artists

FS&IA as one of the few faculties in the country offered an artistic subject of a practical profile.

The research showed that properly chosen didactic personnel was the foundation of the educational process. The requirement to conduct a practical profile was that at least half of the didactic personnel of the Faculty would gain professional experience outside the University. It contributed to forming network relationships. The Faculty was not only interested in teachers conducting intensive professional activity outside the Academy, but also in making specialists, not connected with the Academy on a day-to-day basis, interested in the students.

The conducted diagnosis proved that the programme of the studies at the Faculty fostered it. Specialists from outside, employed on the contract or as visiting professors, were invited to participate in the didactic process.

It was observed that, in both cases, it encouraged building network relations. On the one hand lecturers at the Faculty took care of their high skills level in order to be competitive in the offer of the Faculty. In case of sculptors, it meant, among others, remaining active in an outside environment. On the other hand, during the observation process, one could notice that specialists from outside, facing a potential possibility of more or less stable cooperation with the Faculty, undertook various types of activities, enhancing their suitability for prospective cooperation, nurturing the contact with the University environment. It was

confirmed that in the observed practice it was frequently done by way of participation in conferences, open air sessions and mutual projects.

As a result of the conducted research it may be noted that the phenomenon of forming mutual relationships occurred as a result of peculiar coepetition. Educators of the Faculty and artists not associated with the University permanently, cooperating within similar areas of activities, competed with one another as creative individualities. The “side”, positive effect of that was a concurrent upgrade of the level of working staff as well as enhancement of the professionalism of the potential Faculty associates. In case of sculpture, meaning art discipline – offering clients (students) the possibility of cooperation with well-known creators was, among others, extremely important in the battle for applicants.

Case study – relations network between FS&IA and companies

The phenomenon of interuniversities coepetition was noticeable in the observed practice. Universities competed with one another in a battle over the level and customer (candidate), simultaneously organizing together research projects and workshops, upgrading the level and prestige of all co-participants. FS&IA was involved in this kind of activity by building networks of relationships with other universities. It was observed that an example of such coepetition was the project of All-Poland Platform of Academic Cooperation 2017, which, in the form of in-house activities at the Center of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko (CRP in Orońsko), gave the possibility of cyclic “competitive cooperation” between the two chosen organizational units from different universities.

The abovementioned partner of the activity, CRP in Orońsko, was an external stakeholder for the Faculty that supported didactic activity. The essence of this collaboration was that both sides undertook it due to diverse, specific goals that differed from one another.

In the course of the observation, FS&IA was entering relationships with stakeholders that offered didactic equipment and its service. An example was the cooperation with a company offering design and production services in the field of creating commemorative medals. The relationship consisted of: on the one hand obtaining talented employees among the students and graduates of the Faculty for cooperation, on the other hand, the Faculty counted on the advantage in the form of using the technical background of the company in the didactic process, the implementation of student traineeships, and increasing the attractiveness of the studies, being the one offering potential employment after graduation.

Another observed example was the producer of foundry and ceramic furnaces, which, when entering into cooperation with FS&IA, assumed that graduates trained in the use of its products, familiar with their values, would provide the company with a demand for their own professional activities.

It has been reflected by the big number of candidates for the studies. It is also characteristic that the substantial proportion of applicants are the people building their careers with an increased awareness, frequently supplementing at the Academy the previously received formal education also in other areas of study.

Interior Design in a general academic profile – case study

The Faculty of Industrial and Interior Design (FI&ID), during the course of the observation, conducted bachelor's and master's degree studies with a general academic profile on the two design faculties reflected in its name. The main goals of the study in this profile were to involve and engage students in the academic research.

Case study – relationship network of FI&ID

The conducted case study confirmed that native research at the industrial design studies constitute of any functional and ergonomic analyses, as well as search for new forms of manufactured products. It was observed that, in connection with that, the Faculty managed a very well-developed network of cooperation with outside companies, introducing research topics for educators and students through the Technology Transfer Centre, established at the Strzemiński Academy of Art Łódź.

Creating such a network of relationships between the company and the Faculty was extremely valuable and educational for both parties. The company had access to fresh visions, which were quite frequently a motivation for gaining new manufacturing possibilities and new technologies, whereas the Faculty, and primarily the students - as confirmed by the diagnosis - had the opportunity to learn about the reality of working in the market and to access a range of technologies that various companies, participating in the network, possessed. The design research over form, function or functional process were meant to bring the implementation of an item, competitive in the means of design and functionality, designed by young designers of industrial design studies, into production, with the use of the technology provided by the company. The experience and knowledge of the educationalists leading student project teams guaranteed a professional solution to the given problems.

The research also confirmed that very often the network of cooperation and relationships between the company and the Faculty was the reason of the company's acquisition of funds for new technologies or implementation of new products. Manufacturers contacted the Faculty and started cooperation on innovative projects requiring new machinery and acknowledging new technologies.

As it was observed, the early linking of students to the labour market and the job market facilitated their start-up in an independent professional life. The possibility to get to know a variety of technologies in a didactic cycle and creating their own network of relationships was especially important for industrial designers who could get to know the latest technologies and then be able to use them in their projects.

Another advantage of cooperation between the Faculty and various companies was the possibility of providing students with a place to attend professional practice. Frequently, as confirmed by the research, students after the practice in selected companies, using their own network of relationships, returned to the company during the completion of the thesis,

creating a project that the company performed with the help of its technology, or even implemented as another product.

The conducted research brought an overview of the companies that through the implementation of good design became increasingly competitive and their products recognizable and valued. Functioning in a network of relationships with versatile designers was invaluable for companies, leading to the development and growth of competitiveness. One may also notice that the companies operating in the relationship network with FI&ID appreciated professional design services and often reconstructed or referred interdisciplinary teams within their structures responsible for product implementation and design. As a very important aspect of the relationship network, it is important to recognize that companies who had contact with the University as external stakeholders influenced the direction and methodology of educating designers whom, after graduation or often earlier, employed to their design teams. Good education during the course of study and contact with the realities of functioning of companies significantly reduced the period of adaptation to the conditions of employment and effective work.

An example of good practice in networking was also inviting individual designers to workshops and lectures during which they familiarized students with the realities of the profession and the positives of networking.

Conclusions

Being aware of the limitations of the conducted research, such as small number of cases examined, it should be noticed that the Strzebiński Academy of Art Łódź achieves its effective functioning via cooperation with companies, designers and artists and this is its indicator of success. It may be observed already in the enrolment phase for bachelor's and master's degree studies at the FI&ID that creating relationship networks with producers brings benefits. Candidates, especially for the master's degree studies, more often decide to apply to Łódź on the basis of information about close relationship of the Faculty and students with companies – employers already during the studies. Undoubtedly it is connected with their increased awareness, when compared to candidates for the bachelor's degree studies, of what studying design really means. Postgraduate studies offered by the Faculty also enjoy considerable popularity and within their principles they also include cooperation with companies and realization of tasks in the form of implementation contests.

Future research directions will undoubtedly focus on measurable aspects of cooperation with companies and external institutions – thus, for instance, market analysis in terms of searching for those stakeholders whose participation in the educational process will be the most desirable from the point of view of the candidates, or study of the effects of the cooperation with the current stakeholder network.

In summary, contemporary art and design studies should generate a variety of network relationships with the environment.

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Artysta – uczelnia – przedsiębiorstwo: tworzenie sieci relacji biznesowej

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest pokazanie relacji Akademii Sztuk Pięknych im. Wł. Strzeńskiego w Łodzi z rynkiem. W artykule postawiono hipotezę, że jedną z głów-

nych przyczyn efektywnego funkcjonowania uczelni jest tworzenie więzi sieci relacji biznesowych z przedsiębiorstwami i artystami. Opracowanie podzielono na części: teoretyczną i praktyczną. W części teoretycznej opisano przyczynę zajęcia się problematyką i istotę sieci relacji biznesowych, w tym nurty motywacji tworzenia sieci, a ponadto uwarunkowania współpracy uczelni z innymi podmiotami. Część praktyczna artykułu ma na celu przedstawienie wyników badań obserwacji uczestniczących prowadzonych w Akademii Sztuk Pięknych im. Wł. Strzemińskiego w Łodzi w latach 2007-2017 na dwóch wydziałach: Wzornictwa i Architektury Wnętrz oraz Rzeźby i Działań Interaktywnych.

Słowa kluczowe: sieć, relacje biznesowe, uczelnia, artysta, przedsiębiorstwo.

Kody JEL: I23, I25, Z11

Артист – вуз – предприятие: формирование сети бизнес-отношений

Резюме

Цель статьи – показать, как выглядят отношения Академии изящных искусств им. Владислава Стржеминьского в Лодзи с рынком. В статье выдвинули гипотезу, что одна из основных причин эффективного функционирования вуза – формирование узлов сети бизнес-отношений с предприятиями и артистами. Разработку разделили на части: теоретическую и практическую. В теоретической части описали причину обсуждения проблематики и суть сети бизнес-отношений, в том числе русла мотиваций формирования сети, кроме того – обусловленности сотрудничества вуза с другими субъектами. Практическая часть статьи преследует собой цель представить результаты обследований по методу включенного наблюдения, проведенных в Академии изящных искусств им. Вл. Стржеминьского в Лодзи в 2007-2017 гг. на двух факультетах: Дизайна и архитектуры интерьера, а также Скульптуры и интерактивных действий.

Ключевые слова: сеть, бизнес-отношения, вуз, артист, предприятие.

Коды JEL: I23, I25, Z11

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