

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROJECTS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PETROȘANI

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ABSTRACT: *In this paper, following a brief presentation of the role of entrepreneurship education in modern society, we showed the context of the emergence of student entrepreneurial societies as a necessity in Romanian universities. After highlighting the main tools for educating the entrepreneurial spirit presented in the legal regulations, we presented the projects carried out by the Student Entrepreneurial Society of the University of Petroșani, namely the four projects financed by institutional development funds and a project financed by the Human Capital Operational Programme.*

KEY WORDS: *projects, entrepreneurial skills, student entrepreneurial society, institutional development funds, Human Capital Operational Program.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *M21.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Entrepreneurial education is an extremely important formative approach, given that a successful entrepreneur must develop, in addition to his own personality traits, certain specific skills.

Consequently, stimulating entrepreneurial thinking is a priority all over the world, being an engine of the well-being of people and communities. Most economists agree that entrepreneurship has a positive effect on growth in developed countries (Sautet, 2013).

Entrepreneurial education has “*an applicative character, because it involves the formation and development in students of specific skills, which they can use when needed, and the teaching-learning activity is required to be student-cantered and as close as possible to the immediate economic reality.*”

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Entrepreneurial education, par excellence, has “*a finalist character, specifying the goals pursued before the actual start of the activity. It works on the basis of a subject (education) - object (education) interaction, permanent and dynamic interaction, instructive training, in a complex socio-psycho-pedagogical context.*”

Nowadays, the management of the educational system militates for the realisation of an entrepreneurial education, which is a necessity for the Romanian education. Higher education institutions can help their students, graduates and employees consider setting up a business as a career option (Ciucan-Rusu & Timus 2018).

As a first step, it is important that each person be helped to reflect on the business, social, environmental and lifestyle goals that are related to their entrepreneurial aspirations and intentions (Ghicajanu, 2020).

For those who decide to set up a business, a personalized mentoring activity can be organized to generate, evaluate and implement ideas, strengthen the skills needed for successful entrepreneurship and - most importantly - find the right people to be part of the team, adequate access to finance and efficient networks.

2. PROJECTS FINANCED FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDS CARRIED OUT WITHIN THE STUDENT ENTREPRENEURIAL SOCIETY SAS UPET

In order to produce medium-term entrepreneurial skills required by the socio-economic environment, within the Romanian universities, the student entrepreneurial societies were established by order of the Minister of National Education ORDER no. 3262 dated February 16, 2017 on the organization and operation of student entrepreneurial societies in the higher education system.

According to the legal regulations, student entrepreneurial societies are structures without legal personality and represent a mechanism to support, develop and encourage entrepreneurship in the university environment, especially among students and graduates of higher education, in order to increase the competitiveness of Romanian universities which has as main duties:

- the elaboration of materials intended for informing and guiding students in the realization of business plans and / or financing projects, related to the fact that the possibility of the university education system to produce in the medium term the required competencies of socioeconomic environment is constantly changing;
- organizing mentoring activities for students who want to set up a start-up;
- encouraging the mentor-student collaboration in order to consolidate and develop some elements of the entrepreneurial skills necessary for future graduates at the level of higher education;
- organizing sessions of start-up projects, business ideas, etc., in order to select proposals to be submitted to the executive board for evaluation and feedback;
- organizing competitions to attract funding for the best projects.

Even if these companies function as structures within the universities, the Ministry of Education and Research supports their activity through financial support granted following the annual competition of projects financed from the Institutional Development Fund for state universities. The competition is conducted according to a methodology for assigning and using the fund for institutional development of state universities and is coordinated by the National Council for the Financing of Higher Education (CNFIS), which will evaluate and select projects submitted by universities.

In the period 2017-2021, funding was granted for six strategic areas: increasing social equity, with a view to social inclusion and increasing access to higher education, linking educational supply with the labour market demand (including those related to career counselling and guidance); internationalization of higher education in Romania; ensuring the proper functioning of university botanical gardens, teaching stations, practice bases and other teaching support infrastructures, similar to the practice bases, within universities, used for training students; supporting the activities of student entrepreneurial societies (SAS) within universities; improving the quality of teaching, including respect for academic deontology and ethics; developing institutional capacity for research in universities. Of the 6 domains, for domain 4, of the student entrepreneurial societies, the maximum amount granted for each applicant university is 250 thousand lei.

The team of students and teachers from the Student Entrepreneurial Society SAS_UPET applied and won the annual competitions organized by the National Council for Higher Education Financing, which shows that within the University of Petroșani there is a consistent concern for increasing the entrepreneurial skills of students from the three faculties. Thus, four projects financed by the Ministry of Education through institutional development funds were won through CNFIS competition:

- “*Successful entrepreneurs with SAS- Upet*” FDI-2017-0407;
- “*START- Upet: Entrepreneur Students for Tomorrow's Romania, trained at the University of Petroșani*”, FDI-2018-0302;
- “*Be an Entrepreneur, Be active in S.A.S. – UPET*”, FDI-2019-0729;
- “*Choose Initiative! Choose Involvement! Join SAS-UPET*” FDI-2020-0103

The amounts related to these projects were also increasing, so that the volume of activities and the equipment of the Student Entrepreneurial Society were commensurate with them.

As it can be seen in the previous figure, in 2017 the project *Successful Entrepreneurs with SAS-Upet* was funded with 45,000 lei, in 2018 the value of the *START-Upet project: Entrepreneurial Students for Tomorrow's Romania*, drawn up at the University of Petroșani was by 56.44% higher, in 2019 “*Be an entrepreneur, Be active in SAS - UPET*” won a amount higher by 29.54% compared to 2018 and the year 2020 brought through the project “*Choose the initiative! Choose involvement! Join SAS-UPET*” the amount of 120,000 lei, namely with 31.57% higher than in the previous year, namely 2.66 times more than in 2017.

These projects were carried out within the Student Entrepreneurial Society SAS-UPET and had as objectives: stimulating the creative potential in the field of entrepreneurship by organizing workshops, internships, events with entrepreneurs from different fields; implementation of adequate tools for the development of entrepreneurial

skills, through specific SAS activities and organization of specific courses in entrepreneurship; increasing confidence in entrepreneurial skills by conducting competitions for students and graduates.

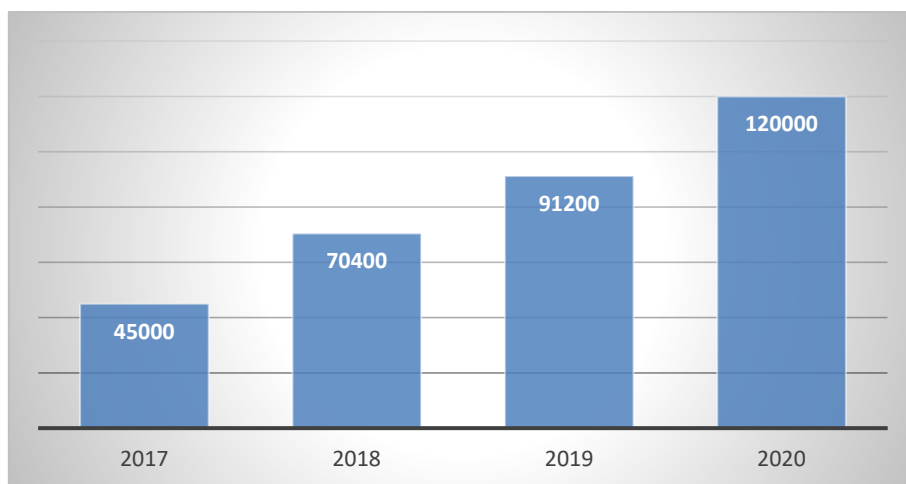


Figure 1. Evolution of the amounts related to FDI-type projects carried out by SAS-Upet

The tools used for the development of entrepreneurial skills are very diverse: workshops, entrepreneurial workshops, reading evenings, boot camps, trips, business idea contests, business plan contests, participation in business events, for example Business-Days, the preparation of observation sheets by mentors in collaboration with students, the annual edition of ProAntreprenor Magazine, the editing of specialized teaching materials by university teachers, the annual organization of the Entrepreneurship and Business Ideas section of the National Student Symposium "Student, Science, Society" of the Faculty of Sciences, the organization of the Green Entrepreneurship course, the annual organization of the Business Mind course etc.

3. PROJECTS FINANCED BY THE HUMAN CAPITAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME

The Human Capital Operational Programme (POCU) pursues investment priorities, specific objectives and actions undertaken by Romania in the field of human resources, continuing the investments made in the 2007-2013 programming period and contributing to achieving the general objective of the Partnership Agreement: reducing development disparities between Romania and the EU Member States.

Within the Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020, Priority Axis 6 "Education and skills", Investment priority 10.ii. "Improving the quality and efficiency and access to tertiary education and equivalent in order to increase participation and education, especially for disadvantaged groups", the University of Petroșani as a beneficiary, applied and won the project EU - ENTREPRENEUR - increase the

participation of students belonging to vulnerable categories in undergraduate programmes through entrepreneurial innovation.

Teachers' concerns for increasing students' entrepreneurial skills are constant so that, starting with May 27, 2019, in partnership with the University of Bucharest, the project POCU / 379/6/21/125144 was developed, "EU - ENTREPRENEUR – the increase of the participation of student belonging to the vulnerable categories to undergraduate programmes through entrepreneurial innovation”.

The project took place over a period of 27 months, between May 27, 2019 and December 10, 2021, in which there were also suspension periods due to the pandemic period and which has a total value of 7,729,873.55 lei.

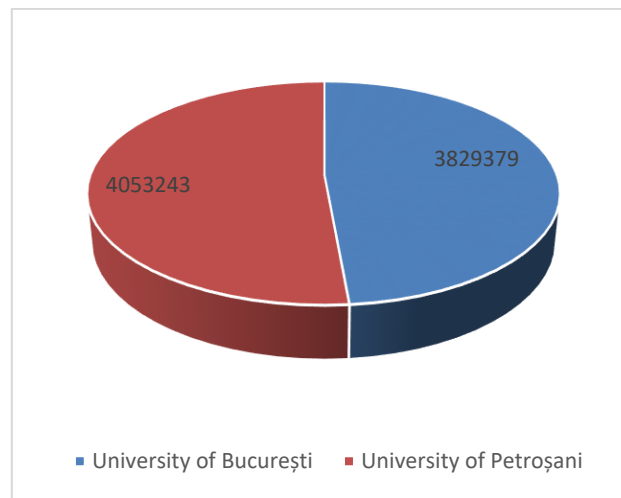


Figure 2. Expenditure statement for applicant and beneficiary

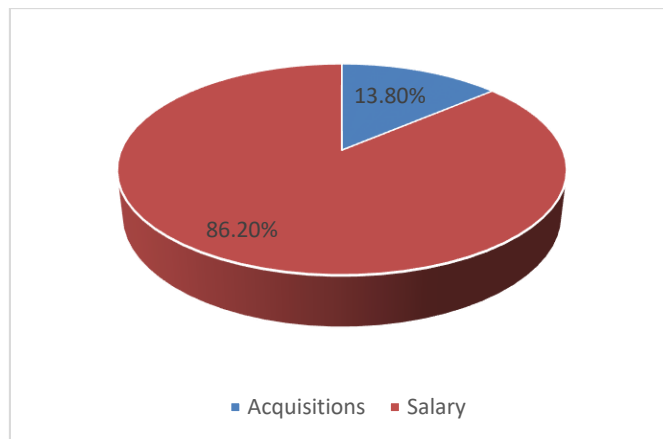


Figure 3. Expenditure Structure

The overall objective of the project is, in correlation with the needs of the labour market, to increase access and equity in tertiary education, as well as the attractiveness, diversification and innovation of educational offers in terms of initiating and completing additional academic and entrepreneurial approaches for final year students of the bachelor's degree in university tertiary education, in close connection with the improvement of the transversal competences of the teaching staff in relation to the modular design of entrepreneurial courses, the organization and provision of online courses / apps and the promotion of new learning environments.

Given that the project will involve final year undergraduate students, teachers, high school students and economic agents who will be involved in project-specific activities, such as additional courses, entrepreneurial workshops, internships, promotional caravans of the educational offer, the project wants to have positive effects on the learning environment in the university as well as a direct and stimulating effect for the business environment.

The project was a very complex one and was carried out with the help of 55 experts from the University of Petroșani and the University of Bucharest who, through their activities, determined the achievement of the following results:

Project results related to students:

- Carrying out 4 complementary courses on the platform <https://cursuri-antreprenori.eu/>
- Assessment of students' socio-professional and entrepreneurial skills <https://eu-antreprenor.eu>
- 207 awards and 47 scholarships
- Organizing a business idea contest 70 students
- Participate in the exchange of experience with universities in Greece
- Participation in experience exchanges with over 50 economic agents
- Participation in entrepreneurial workshops and entrepreneurial caravans
- Receiving the folder with consumables for the target group and two textbooks of good entrepreneurial practices

Project results for teachers in the target group:

- Participation in 2 free postgraduate courses
- Internships for knowledge of the business environment
- Experience exchanges with teachers of the University of Bucharest
- Meetings to analyse good entrepreneurial practices, especially of economic agents who are graduates of the University of Petroșani
- Experience gained by teachers - experts

Beneficial project results for the 2 universities:

- Postgraduate training courses will continue to work for teachers outside the university;
- Presentation of the educational offer of the universities to over 500 students from 25 high schools from 7 counties with the participation of 100 teachers from the pre-university environment through online or campus visits and through entrepreneurial caravans
- Equipment through the acquisitions presented
- Better interaction with students for organizing extracurricular activities.

Project results beneficial to economic agents:

- Presentation of economic activities and portfolio of products and services;
- Knowing a large number of students who can become employees of participating companies;
- Inclusion in the database with economic agents built on the innovation platform
- Knowing the ideas presented by students at meetings.

Consequently, the results show the benefit for all stakeholders involved in the project, from students and teachers to pupils and economic agents.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The developed projects allow the development of students' entrepreneurial skills. Even if these activities do not have immediate effects and do not end with the setting up of business by students, the effects are seen in time.

The implementation in the university of some projects like the ones presented in this paper, determined the involvement of a very large number of students and some of them, either as students or after graduation, develop business or become freelancers. In this context, the University of Petroșani has aligned itself with European Union trends aimed at promoting entrepreneurship which is a key objective of the European Union and the European Council has decided to improve European performance by promoting entrepreneurship and has adopted the "Entrepreneurship 2020" strategy because this economic process is essential for smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

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