



# Strategic partnership of universities as a tool of territorial development dynamics: regional aspect

## Asociación estratégica Universidad-Empresa como herramienta dinámica de desarrollo territorial

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#### ABSTRACT:

The improvement of approaches to higher education is one of the state policy mainstems in contemporary Russia. This is largely due to the fact that 20% of university graduates cannot find their jobs within the first year after graduation. The article discusses the possibility of developing strategic partnership between university and business, as a promising way out of the current situation. Also the authors raise the issue concerning the need to develop performance evaluation of this partnership towards its improvement. While developing the evaluation methodology, the authors reviewed existing approaches and tested the proposed methodology in terms of federal universities, as well as examined the correlation between development levels of strategic partnership and employment of graduates.

**Keywords:** university, strategic partnership, business, employment, performance evaluation.

#### RESUMEN:

La mejora de los enfoques de la educación superior es una de las principales corrientes de la política estatal en la Rusia contemporánea. Esto se debe en gran parte al hecho de que el 20% de los graduados universitarios no pueden encontrar sus trabajos dentro del primer año después de la graduación. El artículo discute la posibilidad de desarrollar una asociación estratégica entre la universidad y las empresas, como una forma prometedora de salir de la situación actual. También los autores plantean el problema de la necesidad de desarrollar una evaluación del desempeño de esta asociación para su mejora. Al desarrollar la metodología de evaluación, los autores revisaron los enfoques existentes y probaron la metodología propuesta en términos de universidades federales, así como examinaron la correlación entre los niveles de desarrollo de la asociación estratégica y el empleo de los graduados.

**Palabras clave:** universidad, asociación estratégica, negocios, empleo, evaluación del desempeño.

# 1. Introduction

In a market economy, business ideology becomes increasingly popular among the universities. This involves searching for mechanisms to ensure effective economic relations of educational institutions and business community. Above all, this concerns representatives of the real sector of the economy, since the relationships with this sector today is not limited just to training of the specialists with required skills. A list of possible joint projects is quite broad, and is characterized by a very high requirement for the quality of their implementation. Thus, the changing role of universities causes the necessity of strategic partnership towards more effective development, capable to provide growth of the regional economy.

At the present stage, main development vectors of the Far East are determined by a number of government programs, the implementation of which is under the spotlight of the governmental and municipal authorities. Assignment to Vladivostok the status of a Free Port, as well as the establishment of Priority Social and Economic Development Areas in the municipalities of the Primorye Territory are aimed at boosting economic entrepreneurship and investment growth in the Far Eastern regions.

Pursuing the current trends will contribute in the future to a favorable business climate, attracting investors, including foreign ones, building mutually beneficial partnership with Asia-Pacific countries, securing the population, and contributing to the growth of gross domestic product. In his address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, President Vladimir Putin underlined that the Far East represents a huge potential for the further development of the country. The migration of the population, especially young people up to 30 years, is the main obstacle to the implementation of government initiatives in the Far Eastern regions.

In many ways, the relationships of the universities with economic environment in current conditions are characterized by a deepening asymmetry between needs of economic environment and the ability of the university to satisfy them. The requirements imposed on universities by the state and society become increasingly higher. In this regard, today we witness the emergence of a *new approach to the university management*, the distinctive feature of which is the development of entrepreneurial ideology, the use of the *intellectual potential*, systematic and large-scale application of *organizational and managerial innovations*, purposefully affecting the market demand and performance results, as well as *increasing the investment attractiveness of the university*, primarily for business partners.

Clark B.R. notes that achievement of fortitude in the external environment and autonomy is one of the objectives of entrepreneurial university development. The necessity of the development of collective entrepreneurship, promoting the acquisition of necessary resources and infrastructure, is emphasized as the basis for such transformation. The level of transformation is determined by the university values. Special attention is paid to the development of interaction with the external environment, extending its forms, especially in the financing area.

This concept was reflected in the works of G. Itskovich, L. Leydesdorff, M. Gibbons, L.P. Kiyaschenko, E.G. Grebenshchikova, L.A. Bokov, A.V. Kobzev, A.F. Uvarov, and Yu. A. Shurygin, et al. through the triple helix model, in which universities have occupied a central position in the development of innovative economy of the region and horizontal linkages between the participants (Clark, 2011; Itskovich, 2010; Leydesdorff, 2006; Gibbons, 1999; Kiyaschenko, 2010; Grebenshchikova, 2011; Bokov, Kobzev, Uvarov and Shurigin 2011; Kiyaschenko, 2010; Grebenshchikova 2011).

Under the effect of various economic processes, universities, like other business entities, are forced to seek more profitable forms of business. Strategic partnership becomes one of them. The strategic partnership in the field of higher education is understood quite often as a certain form of interaction between the university and its strategic partners (Kulikova 2012).

Drokina K.V. considers strategic partnership as a model of the relationship between employers,

government, and educational institutions, the implementation of which will allow reducing or eliminating the imbalance in the labor market, caused by the inconsistency of the qualification requirements of the labor market, the state policy in respect of employment and unemployment, as well as demand for educational services (Drokina 2013). In this case, strategic partnership is tripartite. This partnership should be long-term and focused on the strategic interests of all participants. This can be accomplished through the pooling of resources to achieve the goals.

In our view, the purpose of the strategic partnership should include not only pooling of resources. The availability of the necessary resources is just one of conditions for achieving the set objectives.

Fadeikina N.V. and Cherepanova M.V. are considering the system of strategic partnership at the university as innovation infrastructure element that enables increasing investment and innovation attractiveness, and, consequently, competitiveness (Cherepanova and Fadeikina 2007). The aim of strategic partnership is the promotion of new technologies into production and management, as well as training the professional community for the innovation economy.

Similarly, the phenomenon under study is considered by A.V. Seliverstova, I.Yu. Kudryavtseva, and S.E. Tkach as priority direction of infrastructural transformations in the education sector. The distinctive feature of their approach is that they consider strategic partnership as a model of network interaction between universities and employers, carried out on a voluntary basis towards improving efficiency and achieving common goals (Seliverstova, Kudryavtseva and Tkach 2014).

Strategic partnership as a form of cooperation is considered in particular by the authors such as A.G. Gryaznova, A.M. Makarov, V.N. Ivanov, M. Zinger, and J.Yenki (Gryaznova 2004; Singer and Yankey 1995). Fokin N.I. emphasizes the special importance of the cooperation with economically prominent company, more powerful, able to provide resources to achieve strategic goals (Fokin, n. d.; Singer and Yankey 1995). Azrilyan A.N. pays attention to cooperation of a certain company with a larger and more financially powerful company, possessing resources necessary to achieve strategic and economic goals (Azrilyan 2010; Varkulevich 2009; Efremova 2000; Terent'eva 2011; Scriven 1980).

Thus, the concept of strategic partnership development system of university and business comes to the fore. Here the main task is developing a methodology to assess the development of this system, which bears the dynamic and static character.

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## 2. Methods

One of the key issues that determines the efficiency of the existing development is its high-quality and timely evaluation. Scriven M. pointed to the need for assessing in all activity areas and considered it to be a universal phenomenon (Scriven 1980; American Evaluation Association, 2015). American Evaluation Association (one of the leading organizations in the field of evaluation of programs and policies) defines this concept as follows: "The "assessment" or "assessing" means the analytical procedure, which can be undertaken at all stages of the life cycle of a program, strategy, or policy, and may be aimed at making judgments concerning possible or actual efficiency, sustainability, and adequacy of the policy or program." At that, M. Patton, who is known as evaluation guru, believed that assessment should be aimed at its use, i.e. assessment is required to make judgments about the object and to improve its efficiency (American Evaluation Association).

Experts of International Center for Social and Economic Research "Leontief Center" distinguish three groups of reasons for carrying out assessment:

1. for increasing responsibility and accountability;
2. for further development of a strategic plan or program;
3. for conducting research and gaining knowledge (Patton 2008).

Thus, carrying out performance evaluation of the strategic partnership development is a prerequisite aimed at improving the quality of its implementation.

Researchers recommend conducting the assessment either through the analysis of achievement of goals and objectives for the strategic partnership development, or determination of the level of achievement of target goals in the framework of given area.

Belyaev A. and D. Tsygankov indicate that it is necessary to carry out both internal and external performance evaluation. Internal evaluation is carried out by economic entities themselves, while the external evaluation is carried out by independent experts (Zhikharevich, Zhunda and Karelina et al., 2002). External evaluation involves broader scope of works, as well as greater objectivity of the results. External evaluation is often part of the procedure for external counseling of the customer (for example, on the issues of certain strategy development or policy adjustments).

Some authors propose to evaluate the performance of socio-economic indicators in the context of the efficiency of the existing partnership.

The authors of the work "Program evaluation: methodology and practice" recommend to assess the levels of execution of the planned financing and achievement of the target indicator or index using the following criteria: level of implementation of planned volume of financing, the level of achievement of target indicator or index, and the effectiveness of the implemented measure (Belyaev and Tsygankov 2004).

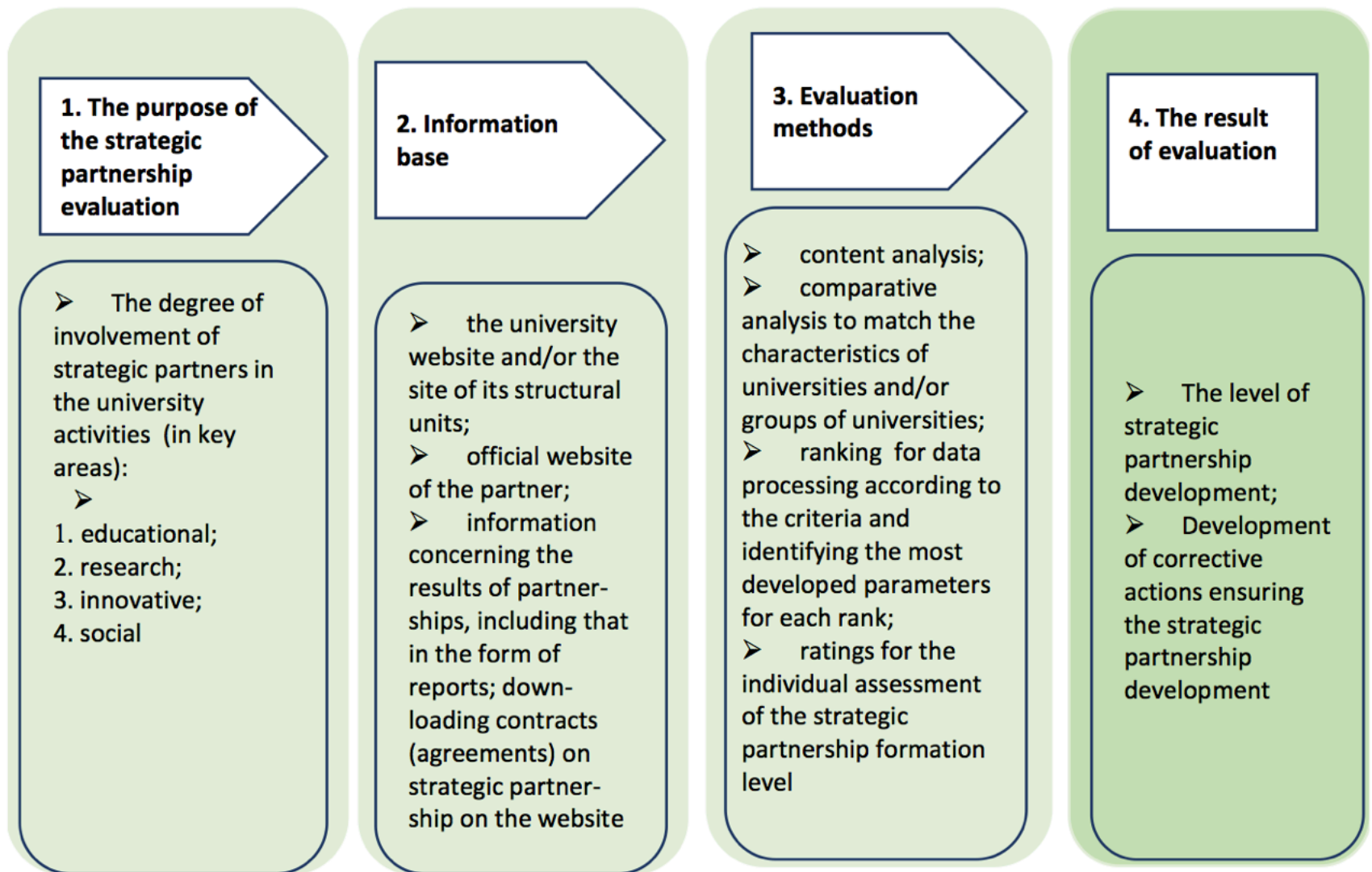
Foreign scientists, in turn, are convinced of the need of bringing stakeholders to the evaluation. So, Rita O'Sullivan, "Partnership evaluation" specialist, writes that "the essence of a partnership evaluation is that stakeholders are systematically involved in the work on planning and assessment". In the United States she has been actively involved in the assessment of policies and programs in various fields, at that the results obtained in the course of these evaluations were quite high. At the same time, among the main criteria for improving the assessment, M. Patton emphasizes exactly this aspect and believes that its further development will go exactly in this direction (Kuzmin, Sullivan and Kosheleva 2009; Jay, O'Sullivan and Costello 2006).

After reviewing existing approaches, we have recommended our methodology, which allows assessing the level of involvement (integration) of strategic partners in the university key areas based on available open data.

Figure 1 presents the evaluation algorithm.

**Figure 1**

Algorithm to evaluate the university strategic partnership.



### 3. Results

Testing of the proposed methodology was carried out in terms of Russian federal universities. The maximum grade that a university could receive according to our methodology was 4 points. Next, we identified the correlation between:

- obtained strategic partnership ratings;
- level of graduates' employment;
- ratio between the wages received during the first year after the graduation and the medium-regional wages.

The obtained data are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Results of the university strategic partnership assessment and relationship with the employment indicators.

University	Rating of strategic partnership	Undergraduates' employment level	Ratio between the graduate's wage and the average regional wage
Kazan (Privolzhsky) Federal University	1	81	88%
Ural Federal University named after the First President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin	4	85	112%
South Federal University	4	80	98%

Siberian Federal University	2	70	88%
Far Eastern Federal University	2	75	81%
North-Eastern Federal University named after M.K. Ammosov	0	70	72%
North-Caucasian Federal University	2	no data	no data
Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University	3	70	82%
Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov	0	85	80%
V.I.Vernadsky Crimean Federal University	0	65	76%

The rating of the strategic partnership was calculated based on open data available at the university websites and open portals of the partners. Thus, we concluded that the highest rating should be assigned to the Ural Federal University named after First President of Russia B. N. Yeltsin and the Southern Federal University. At the same time, it should be noted that graduates from both universities have the best employment rates (85 and 80%, respectively), while their initial wages, despite the lack of working experience correspond to the average salaries of the region. The least points were given to the Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, North-Eastern Federal University named after M. K. Ammosov, and V.I.Vernadsky Crimean Federal University. In this case, despite the fact that the level of employment of the first of these universities is relatively high (due to the specificity of the region), graduate wages are not high enough that indicates the lack of interest of employers towards yesterday's graduates.

Summing up we can conclude that the universities with a higher level of strategic partnership are characterized by a higher level of job placement, at that the wages offered to graduates in the first year correspond to the average wage in the region. This circumstance shows interest of employers in young specialists.

## 4. Discussion

It should be noted that the issue concerning the evaluation methodology of strategic partnership is not new. Thus, to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategic partnership, D.L. Ershov proposes to introduce regulations on monitoring, which should describe:

- axes of activities of parties involved in interaction;
- created control bodies, their interaction and functions;
- types and order of interaction, as well as functions of parties involved in interaction (Ershov 2013).

The main evaluation principle is presented by the performance criterion, which refers to the conformity of the results of the partnership to the objectives of such partnership (in the framework of the project). At the same time, it should be noted that this methodology is focused more on the determination of the commercial effect, which is not always possible as a result of a strategic partnership with the university.

The approach to evaluation of strategic partnership development based on the degree of partners' involvement in each other's activities is considered in the works of domestic authors,

as well as in the methodological rationales used by the universities of the Russian Federation for the strategic partnership management.

Performance measures in this approach include the following: the ratio between the results obtained and the cost of partners' contributions; the amount of income attributable to the partner, which depends on the quality indicator of the completed work; the number of the partnership areas, duration of partnership relations; the number of contracts signed with partner; the scope and importance of joint activities, at that, the last one is measured by the importance of the resources being created for partners; resource and financial support of a partner; the dynamics of statistical indicators of partners' activities, etc. The correspondence to the Pareto efficiency criterion is considered as the basic principle.

To assess the effectiveness of partner's involvement in investment projects related to transport construction, implemented under the public-private partnership, Naumova K.V. considers as necessary parameters the following ones: first, the proportion between the distribution of the results and the cost of contributions invested by the partners, and second, the amount of income attributable to the investor depending on the quality indicator of the work performed (Naumova, 2012; Kamenskykh 2014).

Kamenskykh N.A. developed a technique, which is based on the interest coordination matrix to assess the effectiveness of strategic partnership in municipalities. The main methods include statistical approach as well as scoring and assessment criteria (Naumova 2012).

The obtained results are proposed to use when making management decisions on the development and amendment of the goals and objectives of the strategic partnership on the part of the municipality.

Moshkova L.E. believes that the key principles of indicators system formation include the objective balance, measurability of strategic goals, unity of methodological base, multicriteriality, indicativeness of indicators, and multiple-level assessment system (individual effectiveness, functional efficiency, and overall efficiency).

Some universities develop in-house methodologies to assess strategic partnership development. In particular, Omsk State University named after F. Dostoevsky uses the approach, which is based on the determination of the strategic partners' involvement in joint activities (methodology was developed by the University Academic Council) (Moshkova 2014; The mechanism for determining the strategic partners of the university; Target program on "Strategic partnership"; The implementation of the balanced scorecard, 2008).

The following assessment criteria are suggested to evaluate the involvement of strategic partners in the activities of both the university in general and the individual faculties:

- involvement in the educational process;
- providing practical training of students;
- employment of graduates;
- the existence of a contractual relationships;
- scope and importance of the joint activities;
- the partner's rating in the region.

Criteria assessment is carried out using quantitative and qualitative indicators, and is mostly based on the determination of natural values.

In Penza State University of Architecture and Construction, performance evaluation of university strategic partnership development is carried out using the following indicators (The mechanism for determining the strategic partners of the university):

1. scope and performance efficiency of actual graduation and course projects accomplished in the framework of enterprises' orders;
2. resource and financial support of the partnership (provided equipment, repairs, publishing

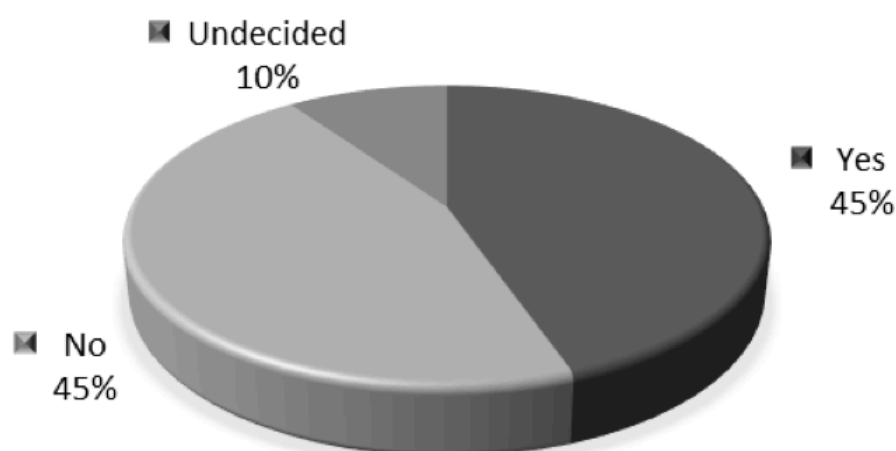
- educational and scientific literature, support of joint activities, and funding of research and development (R&D);
3. actual involvement of company employees in the university educational process (lectures and practical training sessions, supervising training, course works and graduation projects);
  4. creation of joint scientific and educational structures (scientific and educational laboratories, centers, and vocational training departments);
  5. actual involvement of enterprises in the preparation of new courses and curricula;
  6. actual involvement of employers in assessing the quality (expertise) of curricula and graduates;
  7. scope and efficiency of target training.

The basic assessment method consists in comparison: achieved partnership performance indicators are compared to the program threshold values. In our opinion, the assessment criteria are focused more on measuring the effectiveness of partnership, involvement of partners in the university activities, nevertheless they do not reflect the effectiveness of such interaction and the specific contribution of the partner in the achievement of its targets.

It is worth mentioning that most authors agree that a strategic partnership between university and business is a necessary element for the further development of higher education. Unfortunately, at this stage it is impossible to compare specifically the results obtained, because scientists used different objects to test their approaches.

The need of strategic partnership and implementation of its evaluation is testified by the results of our survey performed in September 2016 among young people living in the Far Eastern Federal District. The results are presented in Fig. 2.

**Figure 2**  
The proportion of respondents considering the opportunity of moving from the Far East to other place of residence.



As shown by the review, more than a third of respondents do not associate their future with the Far Eastern regions. This can be evaluated as a negative trend. Respondents reporting their desire to move to other regions justify this primarily by the lack of opportunities for personal growth and development (50%), low living standards (45.5%), and unclear employment prospects (40.9%).

One reason for the current situation is a lack of understanding by young people of their capabilities and professional development prospects. In this context, the major task of contemporary university, functioning on the basis of openness principle, should consist in heightening interest of regional entrepreneurs for young specialists – university graduates, as well as ensuring youth's awareness of the need to use their potential for the economy of the attendance area.

## 5. Conclusion

Consequently, we believe that the relationship between the assessment indicators of the level of development of strategic partnership and the graduates' employment is quite important issue. The development of the contemporary economy, which contributes to change of the role



of universities in the region, leads to the formation of the strategic partnership concept that is understood as modifying existing approaches in the university performance. It is worth noting that, of course, the evaluation proposed by the authors is not complete and requires certain modifications, which will be reflected in subsequent work.

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