

Danubian Charter for Young Talents

1. Our Common Mission

High youth unemployment and the brain drain are prime development challenges to be tackled by the countries of the Danube region. Adjusting the educational systems to the major societal needs and economic transformations of the 21st century, and matching education with the requirements of the regional labour market, are key governance challenges. Since companies in most sectors are faced with serious high-skilled labour shortage - not only temporarily but long term - the question of how to enhance employability is on top of the agenda. In order to link education with employment in a systematic way, the labour market relevance of higher education needs to be raised significantly.

Therefore, our aim is to

- create an enabling environment to better professional chances for young people;
- implement practice-oriented study programmes, and to enhance entrepreneurship competencies of professors and students;
- improve the competitiveness of companies and build up their innovative capacities;
- strengthen the regional economic development.

We are following the European Commission's recommendations for improving the quality of education and training systems and to match them with labour market demands in the Danube region. The Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training considers aligning higher education with labour market needs of vital importance to education systems. ESF requires ensuring "young people get the skills that make them more competitive on the job market". According to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) "by 2020, all citizens of the Region should enjoy better prospects of higher education, employment and prosperity in their own home area", therefore "education and training must be relevant to labour market needs." We assure the long-term commitment to reach these goals defined by the EC and the EUSDR (targets PA7, 8, 9 and 10). The project EDU-LAB has been selected as a strategic project within the Priority Area 9 "Investing in People and Skills" of EUSDR.

2. Our Common Vision

The educational systems of the 21st century have to respond to global megatrends which shape our current and future economies: globalization (1), digitalization (2), social and cultural heterogeneity (3), and environmental and demographic change (4). To get along with continuous change and growing complexity both in professional and social environments new competences, abilities and skills are required, such as

- specific professional expertise as basic and orientative knowledge combined with understanding of the complexity and interdependences of our economic system;
- cognitive abilities, especially analytic and problem-solving skills, combined with the ability to familiarize oneself with new and innovative fields of professional activities;
- social, organizational and personal competencies, above all communication skills, the ability to work individually and in a team and under pressure with flexibility and resilience, ability to create and effectively use professional and social networks;
- intercultural competencies, above all openness for other cultures, knowledge of foreign languages, competences related to foreign countries and familiarity with their everyday culture.

Employment prospects for young people must be heavily improved and at the same time the high-skilled labour shortage of companies tackled through practice-oriented study programs. Such programs, combined with applied and innovations oriented research, can contribute significantly to improving the competitiveness of companies and to strengthening the economic development in the Danube region, thus creating a win-win situation for all.

3. Our Common Implementation Strategies

A triple-helix cooperation by stakeholders in higher education/applied research institutions, policy makers/public administration, business associations/companies (and civil society in general which is faced with profound developmental challenges such as an aging population, digitalization, and other) is needed to further practice-based learning. With a New Danubian Governance Model we seek to systematically and long term establish this cooperation in order to develop sustainable structures for the implementation of practice-based study programs, and thus to improve

professional chances for the young generation. The model reflects the outcome of a joint transnational learning process about how to improve institutional capacities which will bring added value for all stakeholder groups in the Danube region. We see the need for a new mindset on which the New Danubian Governance Model is based to combine knowledge and competencies, education and learning processes in a dual way through systematically linking:

- basic knowledge with problem-solving skills;
- expertise with understanding of interdependence and complexity;
- theoretical learning with practical doing;
- analogue with digital forms of learning (blended learning);
- individual with cooperative study processes;
- independent with team-based work;
- hierarchical with individual decision making and responsibility-taking competencies;
- personal cultural identity with intercultural understanding;
- self-reflection with social interaction.

The model entails the active triple-helix cooperation between the three stakeholder groups – higher education/applied research institutions, policy makers/public administration, business associations/companies - and it reaches out to actors in civil society (represented by citizens associations, NGOs, interest/stakeholder groups) as well as necessary driving force. Long term commitment of all is necessary in order to form new or expand existing learning partnerships higher education institutions and companies. Such partnerships are basic for study programs which follow a dual approach.

4. Our Common Culture of Cooperation and Participation

The signing parties push forward for cultural transformation by building a common culture of

- cooperation between the three stakeholder groups by long lasting binding partnerships;
- social responsibility for young people by the stakeholder groups, particularly by companies;
- participation in the development of educational formation by universities and companies, in response to societal needs;
- study programs combining theoretical knowledge and practical skills for professors, trainers and students;
- participation of students in interactive e-learning and working processes in companies;

- innovation in universities adapting and regularly updating the study curricula towards the needs of society and economy;
- applied, socially and environmentally responsible science and research in universities and companies;
- sharing experiences and transparency between the three stakeholder groups;
- governance based on mutual understanding and trust for sustainable cooperation in the fields of education, science and research.

We want to build new hope and motivation for young people: to develop their talents and competencies and to use their skills for developing a career in their home region and thus contributing to the competitiveness of local companies – a win-win-situation for all.

5. Our Common Commitment

As representatives of the three stakeholder groups we are willing to commit to further practice-based learning and to implement a dual model in higher education in the Danube region, by

- incorporating a combination of theory and practice in tertiary education;
- developing a life-long regularly updated learning system in a systematic and sustainable way;
- establishing cooperation between universities and companies in teaching and in applied research enabled by law and stimulated by financial incentives;
- engaging companies to take over a binding responsibility for students and binding commitment in learning partnerships with universities;
- keeping the educational system flexible to follow the actual economic and social challenges through continuous technical and social development;
- strengthening and broadening the stakeholder dialogue by contributing to higher synergies of education systems and labour market demands on all levels;
- encouraging and lobbying for Higher Education Law amendments for establishing practice-oriented study programmes;
- cooperating within a Danubian network for professional education, for example in a Danubian Council for Professional Education.

The Danubian Charter as final document is the outcome of a transnational and participatory learning process by 10 countries (Germany, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Belgium) involved in the EDU-LAB project. It is accessible and available

for any countries facing similar challenges like those of the Danube region; it is to inspire the triple helix cooperation as spelled out in the New Danubian Governance Model. The Danubian Charter can be signed by any organisation or initiative committed to its principles and recommendations.

Signed on 16th May 2019 in Zagreb by