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**Higher Education Institutions as  
Drivers of Economic Growth in Serbia  
and Japan**

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## An Introduction to ATINER's Conference Paper Series

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
Athens Institute for Education and Research

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## **Higher Education Institutions as Drivers of Economic Growth in Serbia and Japan**

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### **Abstract**

The Republic of Serbia has chosen to reform its national economy system by striving towards a society based on knowledge. Every country that is truly committed to economic development relies upon strategies that promote education and create highly skilled human resources, as the most important segment of social development. This means that, for the purposes of inclusion within global economic processes, investment in higher education is recognized as the most lucrative investment that systematically creates a highly educated population, completely prepared to apply the latest scientific and technological innovations and developments. At the very beginning of the creation of modern Serbia, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, education was given its rightful place as it became the foundation of modern, contemporary and well-regulated state. Even then, as well as now, the importance of higher education has been recognized, as an important factor of economic and social development and factor of improvement of modern social and economic relations. Throughout this paper following topics will be considered: transition process and reform of Serbian higher education system as a prerequisite of economic growth, new projects of the Faculty of Philology which are complying with the requirements of the modern age, as well as the Japanese higher education institutions as the drivers of economic growth.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Economic Growth, Serbia, Japan, social development, society based on knowledge.

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The progress of one country is based on continuing education, as the higher education institutions (universities, faculties, colleges, and high schools) assume the role of key bearers of innovation and strategy development. Universities have changed, from classical educational institutions that have employed traditional methods of teaching which were quite remote from the practice and economic sphere, into the powerful generators of the overall development (economic, technological, political and cultural), by finding strategic and priority areas supported through the concept of scientific research. New capital of human resources should be educated for those activities for which there are conditions to be competitive in the international market. The most attractive and the most lucrative are the interdisciplinary studies involving the use of new information technologies. Apart from the formal education, at the focus of interest are also various forms of informal learning, which is more flexible and useful in the application of the concept of lifelong learning.

In order to meet the challenges of modern tendencies, universities need to introduce new methods, both in teaching, as well as in the process of management of the university. As for teaching, it is necessary to provide students the latest theoretical and practical teaching methods. The ultimate goal of education will, therefore, be the acquisition of as many competencies as possible, which will have as a final outcome highly educated individuals adequately equipped to answer the needs of ever-changing labor market. Modern management inevitably requires the introduction of the work quality management system, continuous improvement in productivity, shortly the formation of the quality management, which will create the best balance between investment and actual results, at the institutional level, while producing, at the national level, conditions for international cooperation and participation in the technological, economic and cultural challenges of globalization.

In the past economists criticized “higher education institutions as inefficient, bureaucratic, and economically unproductive”<sup>1</sup>. Invested efforts to reform higher education institutions will have as a final outcome fully capable universities of becoming financially responsible and independent. As the budget funds are being allocated to universities who have to manage them wisely and in accordance with the pre-established criteria of quality teaching and research, and as the funds from the government's budget intended for the education are increasingly diminishing, universities of the future will have to establish clear priorities, carefully review the policy on off-budget revenues and achieve a balance between the various non-profit and profit-making areas. This will enable increased efficiency in the use of available resources.

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<sup>1</sup>Välimaa, J., Ylijoki O. (2008). *Cultural Perspectives on Higher Education*. Springer. p. 10.

## **Transition process and reform of Serbian higher education system as a prerequisite of economic growth**

At the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century reforms were initiated in Serbia in the economic, but also in the education system. In an age of transition, Serbia has chosen the values and standards of the European Union and began the process of harmonization of regulations in all fields, in order to become more competitive and to actually become a full member. Within the educational framework two important documents were signed, which regulate and standardize processes of higher education in Europe. These are the *Lisbon Strategy*<sup>1</sup>, signed in Lisbon in 2000, and the *Bologna Declaration*<sup>2</sup>, signed in Bologna in 1988. The common feature of these documents is the fact that, by its implementation, conditions are created, through the development and reform of universities, for citizens to have a better life through increased competitiveness, which is entirely based on knowledge. The University is considered to be an important carrier of the responsibility for generating positive changes, since it allows the combination of knowledge, innovation and the optimization of human capital, linking education and economy sectors, as well as increasing the growth potential of productivity.

By comprehending the importance of engaging in global processes and by signing these documents, Serbia undertook reforms of the education system in order to make it more closer to the overall industry-economic sector and to become a generator of positive change based on five priority areas: knowledge society, unique and unified market, construction of a flexible labor market and strengthening of social cohesion, improving the entrepreneurial climate and environmentally sustainable future. This created conditions for better integration and coordination of research programs and institutions, in order to maximize use of their capacities and performance and to integrate into the European Research Area.

In 2001 Serbian Ministry of Education and Sports designated as its primary objective, in terms of higher education, the establishment of the modern system of higher education in line with the Bologna process. From that period the main objectives are: to increase the efficiency of the higher education system in terms of reducing the number of people who drop out of university, as well as reducing the length of studying – by introducing two-stage (two-tier) system with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) as a measure of the students' workload; harmonized system with the European tendencies focusing on quality assurance – by introducing control mechanisms to ensure a high level of quality of learning outcomes, teaching and research; establishment of the curriculum relevance taking into account national needs and demands of the labor market; promotion of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary programs for new professions created in the technological era and the concept of applied studies that provide skills and competencies

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201107/20110718ATT24270/20110718ATT24270EN.pdf>, accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>2</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>, accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

required by the labor market; involvement of students as partners in the educational process and promotion of mobility of students and teachers. On a broader scale, this implies: contribution to the democratic development of the country, support to the transition process especially in terms of economic recovery and promoting the value of European integrations. These activities have led to the development of the strategy for the reform of the Serbian higher education. By adopting new regulations, such as the Higher Education Act, conditions were created for the process of standardization of higher education institutions and study programs, through the system of accreditation, in order to better integrate the higher education system of Serbia into the European system of values.

Several activities have been identified as having the highest priority in the reform strategy for higher education. The choice was guided by different factors. It was essential to set the basis for future assessment of the existing higher education institutions, and to establish a clear procedure for reorganization in order to meet the criteria. The Agency for Accreditation was chosen as a starting point. Afterwards the methodology for accreditation was specified for public and private educational institutions. A comparative review of the accreditation agencies was made and methodologies applied in most European countries, USA, Canada and South Africa were outlined. This overview is created as a proposal for the establishment of the Accreditation agency in Serbia. In January 2003, the National Council for Higher Education has appointed the Commission for Accreditation that is entirely dedicated to designing and implementing the accreditation procedure.

The first cycle of accreditation, through which all higher education institutions went through, contributed to the introduction and improvement of the quality of the higher education institutions, and got the Serbian education system closer to one of the most important goals of the Lisbon strategy: human resource development, education and training for all citizens in order for them to live and work in a society based on knowledge. Thus, a flexible concept of permanent education and lifelong learning was adopted as one of the guiding principles, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and abilities, highly promoted in the European Union, which will eventually make Serbian institutions of higher education generators of economic development.

### **New projects of the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade complying with the requirements of the modern age**

The Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade, as an educational institution marking two hundred years of tradition in higher education, boasting a wide range of educational, cultural and scientific interests and activities and offering the study of 34 languages, cultures and literatures, is one of the leading institutions in Serbia in terms of developing intercultural and multicultural projects. Bearing in mind that the labor market is constantly changing, and that the university curriculum should adapt to the modern era,



we have dedicated ourselves to developing and organizing specific study programs in order to follow up with European Higher Education Area and the Europe 2020 strategy. The main goal is to adjust our study programs with academic institutions in the European Union and the region. Comprehending the extent to which the rate of highly educated people is important for economic prosperity of nations, the European Commission provides tremendous support for the development of higher and lifelong education through various projects and programs and proposes various measures to improve the results of higher education institutions, such as: development of higher education policies, supporting reforms in higher education by introducing the Bologna Process, promoting co-operation between universities from countries beyond the European union within the Tempus projects, modernization of higher education system through “exchange of examples of good policy practice between different countries”<sup>1</sup> and funding students to study or work abroad by becoming a part of the Erasmus Programme. Faculty is constantly applying for new projects with the European Commission.

The Faculty of Philology aims to educate autonomous, motivated students, who can become highly qualified, globally oriented professionals and humanists. These graduates are supposed to be true citizens of Europe and the world in general, fully adaptable to different professions and changeable markets and ready for lifelong learning. The study program, developed under this strategy at Faculty of Philology in Belgrade, is called *Language, Literature, Culture* - LLC. It includes and offers observations of different cultures in multilateral dialogues; a wealth of disciplines and languages; modularity; interdisciplinarity; interculturality; and orientation towards learning outcomes. This undergraduate study program is very complex, as it offers a platform that enables more than 1000 students to choose from more than 30 different languages, literatures and cultures, and all possible combinations of the courses offered. It is based on the mandatory choice of a main field of study, while offering multiple and flexible modularity through a wide range of diverse electives. LLC enables the creation of a solid curricular framework, as well as the recognition of philology as a homogenous discipline within the humanities. While dealing with cultures in contact, it combines research and practice and promotes multilingualism and multiculturalism by creating intercultural bonds.

The main aspiration of master's studies *Language, Literature, Culture* is to form highly qualified professionals with specific theoretical academic knowledge and skills in the field of philology, linguistics, literature, science, culture, librarianship and information science. Upon completion of this master's program, students should acquire the following abilities: basic knowledge of the methods of scientific research; ability to apply scientific methods and procedures in the process of research; critical thinking and approach to research process; ability to understand, to think critically, to

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<sup>1</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/higher\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/higher_en.htm), accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2013.

analyze and synthesize and to solve problems in all areas of language, literature and culture; ability to apply the acquired theoretical knowledge in practice; ability of communication and cooperation within the micro and macro environment. These experts could, therefore, perform tasks in the fields of education, journalism, translation, librarianship, information science, and culture, as well as in all other areas that require knowledge of foreign languages, literature and culture. The ultimate goal is to attract future graduates to continue to be involved in scientific research at PhD level.

The Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade submitted project proposal under the sixth call of the TEMPUS IV program (*Joint projects - curriculum reform*), with the support of relevant institutions in Serbia and the EU, from the academic, economic and public sector, willing to create interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies. By considering Serbian national priorities we have wrote the project *Fostering Interdisciplinary Learning in Media, Information, Communication and Culture Studies in Serbia* (FILMICS) which is created in order to combine various disciplines of higher education in the context of economic activities relevant to the development of the society in the modern information age and the development of Serbia in the process of European integrations, which are (according to the Classification of Activities in the Republic of Serbia): information and communication, professional, scientific, innovative and technical activities, administrative and support service activities, artistic creativity, and cultural activities. By linking disciplines that interact within the labor market, higher education institutions become more relevant, as they comply more with the needs of the labor market in the area of appropriate professional activities, while encouraging quality development of appropriate industries and the society as a whole, on the local, regional, and international level.

Throughout this project we intend to develop a flexible curricula of graduate studies, which will concentrate primarily on jobs that require complex interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, a high level of inventiveness, resulting in the acquisition of interdisciplinary competencies, necessary in order to live and work in the modern society: multilingualism, problem solving, basic knowledge of programming and web administration, project management, teamwork, communication and presentation culture, work organization, analysis of databases, media and information literacy, digital culture, editorial skills, etc.. . In addition to adequate curricula, the sustainable model of cooperation between higher education, business and public sector in the fields of listed activities would also be established through this project.

### **Japanese Higher Education Institutions as the Drivers of Economic Growth**

Japan, as a country with highly ranked colleges at the world most prominent university lists, is investing heavily in the usefulness and applicability of its study programs. Some of the best universities in the world,

judging by the research funding , citations of research publications, entrance exam difficulty, and a reputation survey, such as University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, Osaka University, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tohoku University and others are the vivid proof of that dedication. “Japanese public universities have fairly similar profiles, and therefore strength in one area tends to be matched by strength across the board, including recruiting good students and educating them well. Private universities, however, tend to have different profiles.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly to Serbia, Japanese public universities are more highly regarded than private ones, which primarily relates to the National Seven Universities. Having in mind the fact that throughout the rich Japanese history greatest leaders studied at national universities, it is completely understandable why these faculties have a prestige and why the distinct difference in quality between public and private universities still exists.

Unlike the Serbian students who enrol university with certain ease, students in Japan have to go through a number of entrance examinations (nyūgaku shiken (入学試験)) in order to get entrance in one of the desired universities. Upon completing their studies, only graduates from most respected universities can get a job in large corporations or the government department. Since Japanese people give such importance to academic credentials and considering the fact that the economy of Japan is the third largest in the world by nominal GDP and fourth largest by purchasing power parity, it is understandable that they invest largely in universities and that it is very difficult to pass entrance exams. Close relationship that exists between university background and employment opportunities in Japan is the result of well-organized study programs, which will have as the ultimate outcome highly skilled professionals who are ready to adapt quickly to the changing labour market. Therefore, we can state with certainty that Japanese Higher Education Institutions are indeed proper drivers of economic growth of this major economic power.

## Conclusions

The higher education sector in Serbia is increasingly being recognized as a crucial sector of the socio-economic development and as an incubator of ideas and knowledge. The Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade, as an esteemed higher education institution, is committed to creating, by taking on the concept of the entrepreneurial university and willingness to consider multidisciplinary approach, new study programs in accordance with the highly changeable labour market. By using the latest multimedia information technologies and by actively responding to the process of globalization, we are striving to become the forerunner and the carrier of the modern education vision in Serbia, where it would be extremely useful to look up to Japanese universities.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.nigelward.com/top30.html>, accessed on 18/04/2013.

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