Handbook of Research on Entrepreneurship Policies in Central and Eastern Europe

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INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet bloc in the last decade of the twentieth century coincided with the global explosion in information and communication technologies (ICT), which has had a tremendous and widespread impact on virtually all spheres of human life. With respect to entrepreneurship, the ICT revolution has been reflected in the emergence of a dynamic, innovative segment within the traditional small business sector. Strong inter-relationships between entrepreneurship, innovation and higher education are fundamental for achieving long-term socio-economic goals, so they have attracted the attention of policy makers.

In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), particularly in Poland, the end of the twentieth century also brought a rapid expansion in the tertiary-level education sector. This chapter addresses the role of educational programmes in transition economies, as exemplified by Poland, in enhancing an entrepreneurial spirit among students and in developing the skills necessary for launching dynamic, knowledge-based businesses. As background, we outline key directions in entrepreneurship education at the university level in Poland after 1989. Next, we review principal lessons derived from teaching entrepreneurship in western (mostly US) academic institutions and then summarize our experiences in launching the ‘Dynamic Entrepreneurship Programme’ in Poland, which is aimed at accelerating entrepreneurship education at Polish universities. The succeeding section identifies barriers and success factors in launching entrepreneurship programmes at the university level in a transition context. Key findings and recommendations that can be particularly relevant for transition economies are summarized in the final section.

TRENDS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN POLAND AFTER 1989

The expansion of the private segment of the higher education system in Poland after 1990 has been equally dramatic as the growth of the small
University-level entrepreneurship education in Poland

In 1990–91 there were 112 institutions of higher education, the vast majority of which were public, serving 404,000 students. By 2006–07 this number had increased to 455 institutions, with all but a few of the newly established institutions being private. The number of students reached 1,941,000 in 2006–07 and was 4.8 times higher than the number of students served in 1990–91. The increase in institutions of higher education helped to increase the very low scholarization index (gross) in tertiary education from 12.9 per cent in 1990–91 to 49.9 per cent in 2006–07, which is high even compared with the levels achieved by more mature economies (GUS 2008). The rapid expansion of the higher education sector in Poland reflected the unrealized demand for university-level education during the communist era, when a maximum quota for students in public universities was imposed. After 1990, not only the younger generations but also more mature people took advantage of the opportunity for higher education. Students correctly perceived earning a higher education diploma as the path to increasing employment opportunities and future incomes while, at the same time, entrepreneurial members of the academic community embarked on founding new private schools.

A particularly important development in entrepreneurship education in the Polish education system was the introduction of an obligatory course ‘Basics of Entrepreneurship’ in secondary schools in 2002. While its implementation has been hampered by a shortage of teachers with proper qualifications and attitudes, it opens the door for proactive teachers to implement additional initiatives aimed at building entrepreneurial spirit among students in the secondary schools. The institutions of higher education in Poland enjoy much greater freedom than do the secondary schools regarding the structure and content of courses offered; however, they must follow some specific guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. According to these guidelines, a course on entrepreneurship is obligatory in only one field of study, that is Management (for a detailed presentation see Wach 2008). Within their own jurisdictions, however, institutions of higher education have taken various measures to introduce entrepreneurship courses in their curricula. Among private business schools established during the 1990s, about 20 incorporated ‘entrepreneurship’ into their names, with a clear intention to emphasize their strategic orientation towards the small business sector.

Some of the public economic universities as well as the private business schools have introduced entrepreneurship as a specialization at the master level in the economics and management fields of study. However, such teaching initiatives have brought mixed results because of weaknesses in course designs and methodologies, leading to a declining trend in offering entrepreneurship courses in recent years. One of the weaknesses was that
instruction more often dealt with entrepreneurship in the traditional small business environment, rather than stimulating entrepreneurial initiatives of students in the modern sectors of the economy.

Thus far, the initiatives to introduce entrepreneurship into the curricula of Polish higher education institutions have been almost exclusively confined to business schools and economic universities so, despite some shortcomings, those institutions have recognized the importance of the field. However, the hard sciences, technical, agricultural, medical disciplines, and so on are offered almost exclusively at public universities, where entrepreneurship courses were, until recently, almost non-existent. Therefore non-business universities became the primary domain of the ‘Dynamic Entrepreneurship Programme’ presented below.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCES ACCUMULATED IN MATURE MARKET ECONOMIES

Although the origins of entrepreneurship education in the US can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Katz 2003, Kuratko 2005), its widespread presence in university-level institutions is more recent, encompassing only the last 30 years. Lessons derived from the accumulated experiences of teaching entrepreneurship courses relate to the overall role of education within the broader framework of academic entrepreneurship, the course content and teaching methodologies.

(Entrepreneurship) Education Within a Broader Framework of Academic Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship education must be viewed as an integral part of a broader effort to promote and support academic entrepreneurship initiatives, not only by academic staff but also by students and graduates. This approach is illustrated in Figure 6.1. Various entrepreneurship courses available to all students form the base for more advanced support measures for smaller groups with specific interest in and drive towards entrepreneurship. These measures include participation of industry representatives in the teaching process, coaching and counselling, networking with the business community, and pre-incubation and incubation of entrepreneurial ventures. The most advanced level – academic entrepreneurship per se, which involves support measures addressed to academic staff – requires assistance in resolving intellectual property issues, setting up spin-off/spin-out companies, facilitating access to financing, and so on.
Such an integrated framework provides for positive synergies and efficient allocation of resources. The education programmes, which are relatively less expensive than the advanced support measures, are addressed to a broad student base. Smaller groups presenting the most promising business ideas shall qualify for more sophisticated and costly support. Those students who eventually become members of academic staff or enter PhD programmes will be much better equipped to launch ambitious start-ups. The proposed approach also calls for broadening the definition of expected outcomes, since success in the field of academic entrepreneurship is typically measured by the number of spin-off/spin-out companies by academic staff and the number of student firms established in incubators. However, a capable student who takes a high-quality entrepreneurship course seldom seeks additional support but goes directly into business, sometimes after first taking employment for a short period in order to gain useful experience, obtain industry contacts, and to earn some start-up capital. Identifying such instances in order to measure the course’s impact may not be easy in a university context because it requires close links with the alumni. The effort is worth undertaking, however, as the alumni who

Source: Author.

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run their own innovative businesses are perfect candidates for becoming guest speakers and serving as role models for students.

Lessons Related to the Overall Concept and Content of Entrepreneurship Courses

The key lessons from the accumulated experiences that are related to the overall concept and content of entrepreneurship courses can be summarized as follows:

- Entrepreneurship can be taught, and teaching may contribute to shaping students’ entrepreneurial attitudes and skills. This view has made its way into the entrepreneurship literature, but only after a long debate focusing on the role of natural traits (‘entrepreneurial DNA’) in the entrepreneurial process. The leading US scholar William D. Bygrave formulated this new approach as follows:
  ‘Yes, entrepreneurship can be taught. However, we cannot guarantee to produce a Bill Gates or a Donna Karan, any more than a physics professor can guarantee to produce an Albert Einstein or a tennis coach a Serena Williams. But give us students with the aptitude to start a business, and we will make them better entrepreneurs.’ (Bygrave 2004, p. 2)

- Entrepreneurship is predominantly reflected in the launching of new businesses. Distinct features of the start-up process and the early expansion stage justify focussing on this phase while teaching entrepreneurship. However, launching a new business is a much broader concept than merely the registration of a new business establishment. It starts with the identification and evaluation of business opportunities, the most promising of which are developed in the form of business plans, although not all of these will come to fruition, and leads finally to the implementation of a business plan.

- Entrepreneurship is not only for business students but is also appropriate for non-business students, such as those in engineering, the natural sciences, medical fields, and the arts. This view contradicts the still frequently prevailing view, particularly in Europe, that entrepreneurship should be confined to business studies. The apparent success of many US technology, agricultural and medical universities in running such courses and promoting entrepreneurial attitudes among their students has paved the way for new policy measures in the European Union. The set of initiatives launched recently by the European Commission focuses specifically on entrepreneurial education within non-business studies (European Commission 2008).
The pursuit of dynamic (high-potential, ambitious) entrepreneurship should be seen as a distinct segment calling for different teaching concepts and methodologies, as compared to the majority of start-ups in the traditional small business sector, with no plans to grow (Shane 2008, p. 7). Dynamic, growth-oriented undertakings typically account for a few per cent of new businesses and they seldom exceed 10 per cent of business start-ups (Autio 2007). It is important to attract university-level students to starting more ambitious ventures where they can use the knowledge and skills they acquire during the course of their studies. This approach is particularly relevant in Europe, where there is a traditional focus on small business training (Wilson 2004). However, dynamic entrepreneurship should not be confined to high-tech businesses only; in fact, many successful dynamic ventures are not based on technological innovations (Bhide 2000, pp. 29–36). Figure 6.2 illustrates the concept of dynamic entrepreneurship.

**Lessons Related to Teaching Methodologies**

The most important conclusion derived from accumulated experiences of other countries is that entrepreneurs are different from managers and
should be trained differently using a holistic, rather than a functional, approach. Successful entrepreneurs have the ability to integrate disparate resources and skills into a viable venture and, subsequently, to manage it in an entrepreneurial way (Wickham 2004). The need for holistic teaching also calls for broadening the knowledge of entrepreneurship lecturers in various aspects of business operations. Implementing this idea can be problematic, considering that professors in the management disciplines typically specialize within functional areas such as finance, marketing, and human resources.

One of the key success factors for teaching entrepreneurship rests with the adoption of the ‘for entrepreneurship’ rather than ‘about entrepreneurship’ approach. During workshops in the ‘for entrepreneurship’ approach, issues relating to the business start-up process are discussed; however, they almost always relate to the particular business concepts students elaborate on (individually or in small groups) outside the classroom. Students who take part in exercises, even if they are only didactic games, where they have to make decisions or even set up a real business will learn much more than those who passively listen to traditional classroom lectures (Solomon 2008; Wissema 2005).

Even from the accumulated teaching experiences, it is difficult to point out methods that are universally effective; instead, mixed methods and tools for teaching entrepreneurship have proven to be the most effective. Direct classroom sessions can be combined with web-based tools and supporting materials. However, the latter does not eliminate the ‘paper’ textbook. Direct contact with real business through, for example, inviting entrepreneurs as guest speakers and arranging visits to existing firms is also important.

THE ‘DYNAMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMME’ IN POLAND

The initial impulse to implement the ‘Dynamic Entrepreneurship Programme’ (the Programme in the following) came from analysing the experiences and progress achieved by leading western universities in launching entrepreneurship education programmes for their students as outlined in the previous section. Given the present situation in Poland, it became clear that waiting for bottom-up initiatives by individual universities and lecturers would not yield meaningful progress in the short- or even mid-term toward the goal of catching up. There was a need for a nationwide coordinated effort similar to that undertaken in some western European countries, with the aim of narrowing the gap in entrepreneurship
education between European institutions of higher learning and those in the US. Such nationwide initiatives have included, for example, the UK National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship; the FGF, an association founded for the purpose of supporting entrepreneurship research and education in German-speaking Europe; the Danish IDEA Network; and the Öresund Entrepreneurship Academy, a Danish–Swedish cooperative project.

**Key Features**

An important feature of the Programme is its ‘latecomer advantage’ conceptual foundation (Veblen 1915), which seems to be particularly relevant to entrepreneurship education in an emerging economy that is undergoing systemic transformation. Being late and underdeveloped is obviously a disadvantage in most respects but, at the same time, the latecomer can learn from others’ mistakes, assimilate best practices quickly, and make progress much faster than the leaders in a field were able to do. Entrepreneurship education in emerging economies can greatly benefit from accumulated know-how, particularly that from US academic institutions, about course content, teaching methodologies and tools. This dispersion of know-how has been greatly facilitated in a recent trend by leading academic institutions to make freely available via Internet their teaching materials, as illustrated by the MIT OpenCourseWare initiative (OCW, see http://ocw.mit.edu.pl).

The Programme is based on the principles of social entrepreneurship, that is, the achievement of important social objectives through proactive, innovative and risk-taking initiatives. Although the Programme was designed from the beginning with a view to resolving the issue of insufficient entrepreneurship education at the country level, it was started on a smaller scale because it was an individual initiative. Once the key elements were implemented some governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations were approached to secure financing and establish collaborative links as a step to expanding the Programme.

The focus of the Programme is on non-business-oriented academic institutions, although entrepreneurship has typically been perceived as the domain of people with business education backgrounds. However, the actual experiences of successful entrepreneurs, particularly in the US, have proven that engineering or IT students are just as capable of starting successful businesses if their engineering background is strengthened by a broad and general understanding of certain business subjects, particularly marketing, finance, and legal issues, including IP protection.

Another important feature of the Programme is its network approach
where, rather than waiting for each university to make individual efforts, the Programme established a nationwide network platform to provide tools and teaching materials for the accelerated implementation of entrepreneurship courses by educators from an array of academic institutions. Since 2007, a training the trainers’ component has been added to the Programme. With the financial support of Poland’s Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 20 entrepreneurship lecturers from polytechnics, universities, and agricultural schools received ongoing methodological support and training in launching pilot courses in entrepreneurship. Later, this training will constitute an integral part of the teaching curricula of participating academic institutions. In November 2008, a new grant was received from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education that will provide for the continuation and the formalization of the Polish Network of Academic Entrepreneurship Educators (Polish acronym: SEIPA). The financing for 2009 and 2010 provided ongoing support for the lecturers who were already part of the network, as well as training for 20 new lecturers who will then run pilot entrepreneurship courses for students in their universities. In addition, advanced courses on Technology Entrepreneurship for PhD students and academic staff will be launched in five academic institutions.

**Tentative Results**

Since the beginning of 2006, when the Programme became fully operational, our own experiences have added to those we accumulated from other countries. So far, the Programme has achieved the following results:

- Over 1600 students have been trained in entrepreneurship with the use of the methodology, tools, electronic platform and textbook developed within the framework of the programme.
- Pilot entrepreneurship courses have been launched in 25 institutions of higher education (mostly non-business) throughout Poland that did not have prior experience in teaching entrepreneurship.
- A network of lecturers from polytechnics, universities and agricultural schools has been firmly established. At present, there are some 50 members in the network.
- The accumulated teaching experiences facilitated the preparation of a modern-style textbook on *Dynamic Entrepreneurship: How to start your own business*, which was addressed primarily to the academic community and was published in 2006, with a second edition in 2008 (Cieślik 2008). The textbook and the dedicated portal ‘http://www.cieslik.edu.pl’, which offers supplementary materials and tools for
students, provided a new dimension to entrepreneurship education at the university level in Poland, which has traditionally concentrated on the management of the small business firms (Piasecki 2001, Targalski 2003).

● A separate portal SEIPA which is addressed to entrepreneurship educators (http://www.seipa.edu.pl), features teaching tips and materials for lecturers, serves as a database for teaching materials and cases, and provides a facility with which to run courses (blended learning) by lecturers from various universities who do not run their own websites. The SEIPA portal streamlines the exchange of experiences, materials, and other resources among lecturers who join the network.

● In addition to the basic course in entrepreneurship, new specialized educational initiatives have been developed. During 2006–07 an advanced programme was implemented for 120 students from 32 institutions of higher education, mostly non-business, in the central Mazovia region. In addition to training and advisory support, the students with the best business projects received 6000 € each. The project has been financed by the European Union (EU) Structural Funds. Thanks to financial support from the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP) in 2007, a pilot course on ‘Technology Entrepreneurship’ was conducted for PhD students from polytechnics and hard science departments from universities across Poland. The course was run twice more in 2008, with approximately 60 PhD students participating.

Lessons Learned from the Programme

The results achieved during the implementation process have generally confirmed the experiences accumulated from the academic institutions in the United States and Western Europe. In fact, one of the key issues was the apparent diversity of such experiences, particularly with respect to the variety of course offerings. In the Programme, the decision was made to offer only a limited number of courses, at least during the initial stage, in order to achieve scale economies and tangible results. Second, certain formal and organizational requirements must be taken into consideration, particularly those reflecting the Bologna System that defines the bachelor, master and PhD levels of tertiary education. Based on these prerequisites, the initial course offering promoted under the Programme framework consisted of three categories of entrepreneurship courses. The proposed positioning of each course, in line with the Bolonia System, is presented in Figure 6.3.
The cornerstone of the entrepreneurship teaching is the basic course in entrepreneurship, which, following the recommendations of the European Commission (2008), should be included in the curricula relatively early in the study programmes – no later than the bachelor level. This basic course should provide students with a general understanding of the entrepreneurship and business start-up process, not necessarily with the objective of starting a new venture, but preparing students for such a career option.

The second, more advanced, course, ‘Launching New Businesses’, targets the master level, particularly last-year students who have plans to set up their own businesses. After intensive training and coaching, students present their business plans, and the most promising projects receive some financial support. Needless to say, securing that external funding is critical to the success of this course offering.

The most advanced course, ‘Technology Entrepreneurship’, is primarily addressed to academic staff and PhD students as a preparation for setting up spin-off companies. The programme is heavily blended with issues relevant to technology-based ventures. Additional funding is also crucial because, in addition to the lecturer, a professional consultant is also involved in the course implementation.

Another critical issue that had to be resolved was related to the use
of specific teaching tools and materials, such as the choice of cases that are readily available through case repositories. Cases are widely used in teaching management disciplines in CEE business schools and economic universities. But the initial experiences with Western cases used for teaching entrepreneurship brought mixed results because students felt that these cases did not address the problems and business realities with which they are confronted. Consequently, we have compiled our own illustrative mini-cases that reflect the Polish business operating environment.

The idea of launching entrepreneurship courses in non-business fields, particularly engineering and hard sciences, proved to be particularly relevant in Poland. The students reacted very favourably, even though the courses offered were typically electives. However, implementing entrepreneurship programmes in non-business academic institutions involves deeper adjustments of attitudes and perceptions among students since many of them typically associate entrepreneurship with small businesses, which may be viewed as a less attractive career option for university graduates in non-business fields.

The reaction of PhD students to an advanced course in ‘Technology Entrepreneurship’ was also favourable; however, only a few participants embarked on launching spin-off companies, which was the key objective of the Programme funded by the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP). For most of the students, the course was their first encounter with marketing, financial and business issues in general, and it was too late in their academic careers to overcome technology-based rigidity in their overall thinking about the innovation process. This situation may change when future PhD students have the opportunity to enter the ‘entrepreneurship funnel’ at an earlier stage by taking the basic entrepreneurship course at the undergraduate level.

Some necessary changes to the content of basic entrepreneurship course in technical universities are also worth mentioning: While there are basic rules of starting a business which must be conveyed to all students, irrespective of their specialization, for engineering, IT, and hard science students, the course content should be blended towards their core subjects and should include topics such as:

- identifying business opportunities based on technological innovations
- characteristics of technology entrepreneurs and functioning of entrepreneurial teams
- financing of technology businesses, including venture capital
- marketing of innovative products and services
- intellectual property protection as a strategic business issue.
One important observation derived from the initial courses, which was, to some extent, transition-specific, was that students came to the workshops with the strong built-in perception of entrepreneurship as confined to small businesses and self-employment (under communism private businesses were allowed to operate, albeit on a very small scale). Therefore, the course laid substantial emphasis on building a ‘think big’ culture among students, even if they had planned business activities in the traditional sectors. In some cases, such efforts were quite rewarding. For example, a student of music who enrolled in a programme financed by the EU structural funds during 2006–07 planned to become a professional wedding consultant. In the course of training and with the assistance of a professional consultant, her initial single-outfit concept turned into a franchise network with six franchise units in major cities in Poland and one recently opened in London. Moreover, with the larger scale she was able to fully exploit her natural organizational and negotiating skills and her true talent in coping with media, which a smaller-scale operation would not have used to as great a degree.

Discussions and interviews with students also helped to modify the initial focus on the start-up phase only. Among Kozminski University students, approximately 20 per cent have family business traditions, yet few intend to work for their family businesses after graduation. Parents prefer that their children find a ‘better life’ by seeking employment in large banks, foreign-controlled corporations, consulting firms, and so on. The roots of this attitude originate in the particular characteristics of the transition process, specifically the hardships of and barriers to running one’s own business during the 1990s. During that period, many firms with high growth potential scaled down their ambitions and remained very small. To address this issue, a new training and consultancy project idea has been developed called ‘Accelerating growth of small family businesses’, in which students, together with their entrepreneurial parents, attend a series of workshops and develop a restructuring plan for their businesses, supervised by a project leader and a professional consultant. The pilot implementation of this offspring of the Dynamic Entrepreneurship Programme began in autumn 2009.4

With respect to teaching methodologies, the ‘for entrepreneurship’ methodology proved to be particularly useful, as did mixing class workshops with web-based learning and a standard entrepreneurship textbook. The initial reaction of the lecturers who underwent training in using this methodology was somewhat restrained but, later, they found it much more effective and rewarding than the traditional classroom lecture approach.

One essential adjustment of the ‘for entrepreneurship’ methodology was intended to cope with the ‘business plan obsession’ that makes the prepa-
ration of a formal business plan document compulsory even if the business idea development did not justify it. For the course assessment, it is sufficient to elaborate a shorter document called the ‘initial business concept’.

One surprising finding was that adopting the holistic approach to teaching entrepreneurship (that is, addressing issues pertaining to finance, legal aspects, marketing, human resource management, and so on in an integrated way) makes it more difficult to expand entrepreneurship training to state economic universities and private business schools. This is because a professor of economics or management, running this course in entrepreneurship and following the holistic way would need to take up subjects in which he or she does not specialize, which contradicts the principle of narrow specialization generally followed by the academic community in the management disciplines, both in research and teaching.

KEY BARRIERS AND SUCCESS FACTORS

Figure 6.4 presents the key success factors for launching entrepreneurship programmes at academic level. First, lecturers in entrepreneurship must themselves be ‘entrepreneurial’ in the sense that, in their teaching

![Diagram showing key success factors]

Source: Author.

Figure 6.4 Accelerating entrepreneurship education at the academic level: key success factors
activities, they are proactive and innovative, and are willing to accept some risks. In addition to a sound academic background, these lecturers need to have good relationships with students, along with the organizational skills that will help them with auxiliary support initiatives, like coaching, regular meetings with entrepreneurs and, at the advanced stage, setting up business incubators. Maintaining good relationships with the local business community is also of particular importance. The key barrier is that lecturers with the required skills and attitudes are rare in the academic community. Moreover, when they are occupied with assisting students in their business undertakings, inviting guest speakers and organizing business plan competitions and promotion events, they do not have much time left for the research and publication necessary for advancement up the academic career ladder. This is a widespread condition in many higher education institutions throughout Europe (European Commission 2008).

Second, the support of the top leadership of the institution is critical, particularly during the initial stages of the Programme because there are a number of sensitive issues, going beyond teaching as such, which are to be addressed. For example, the choice of the department in which the teaching unit offering entrepreneurship courses is located, can be a highly political decision. In the case of Polish polytechnics, universities, and agricultural schools, these units have been located in a department offering courses in economics and management. However, following the experiences of many western academic institutions, in the longer-term, there may be a need to establish entrepreneurship centres outside departmental structures to offer comprehensive programmes to all departments, as well as to facilitate initiatives aimed at promoting dynamic, innovative entrepreneurship among students and academic staff. A clear message from the top leadership can be essential to overcoming any negative perceptions regarding teaching entrepreneurship since, often, professors from polytechnics, hard science departments at universities, and agricultural schools perceive entrepreneurship as a ‘soft’ (hence, low-priority) subject in comparison to ‘hard’ subjects like mechanics and chemistry. Even when these barriers are overcome, implementation of the necessary changes can be challenging. The situation in one leading technology university, for example, seemed to be very promising for launching entrepreneurship courses throughout the university: a lecturer in entrepreneurship had been trained and the pilot course had received very high notes from the students. The Rector was enthusiastic and they were able to secure initial external financing. However, implementation has been delayed as a result of prolonged consultations with the deans of various departments where the courses were to be implemented.

The third key success factor relates to securing external financing for supporting entrepreneurship projects developed by students at the master
level. This financing does not have to involve large amounts; for example, under a regional programme for 120 students and financed from EU Structural Funds, only 12 ‘finalists’ obtained financial support amounting to 6000 € each. (Needless to say, this was a strong motivating factor for the students participating in the project.) For the ‘training the trainers’ component, the financing provided by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education paid for the training, teaching materials and ongoing support of 20 lecturers from non-business schools for less than 2500 € per lecturer. As with the university students, this ‘triggering factor’ was key to attracting polytechnics, universities and agricultural schools with no prior experience in entrepreneurship education to join the network initiative.

The EU Structural Funds allocated in the 2007–13 budget seem to be a particularly appropriate source for financing entrepreneurship training in the new EU member states. One important barrier stems from the traditional policy approach in Poland, which primarily links entrepreneurship with self-employment and the small business sector in general. For example, the EU Operating Programme ‘Human Capital’ that is currently being implemented in Poland, has allocated substantial funds to support the unemployed. In addition to training and coaching, they receive financial support to cover their initial investments in launching new businesses. Similar projects addressed to the academic community are confined to training and coaching, not direct financial support.

Finally, networking among entrepreneurship lecturers is essential in alleviating start-up barriers and making the implementation process more efficient. The preparation of the course design, teaching materials, tools, and case studies is costly and time-consuming, and sharing resources, methodologies, and tools among lecturers can greatly reduce such costs. The Polish lecturers who introduced entrepreneurship courses for the first time greatly appreciated the opportunity to get ongoing support and advice on practical issues from the network, and the dedicated electronic platform (portal) proved to be very useful here.

CONCLUSION

The experiences with a particular bottom-up initiative aimed at fostering entrepreneurship education in the Polish universities outlined in this chapter were accumulated during a brief implementation period in 2005–08, so the conclusions and lessons drawn are tentative. However, the general reflection is an optimistic one. While climbing up the developmental ladder, universities – as well as nations and companies – can benefit from the wealth of accumulated knowledge and experience of advanced
economies. The ‘latecomer advantage’ concept became particularly relevant in the era of the ICT revolution, since access to the pool of global knowledge was easier, faster and more cost-efficient for latecomers. The transition economies in the CEE region thus could take advantage of the historic coincidence of the move from a centrally planned economy to a market economy system and the ICT revolution that began in the early 1990s.

However, the initial Polish experiences in fostering entrepreneurship education at the university level points to several problems and contradictions. Even if accumulated knowledge, best practices, and so on become easily accessible, particular skills are needed to ensure the efficiency of the assimilation process. First, even with the wealth of available knowledge, it is important to assess its relevance to a particular socio-economic context. Second, it is not realistic to assume that the required know-how can be simply picked ‘from the shelf’ and be ready to use because it typically requires considerable adaptation to the local environment.

Thus far, accumulated experiences relate primarily to the initial assimilation of western know-how and best practices in teaching entrepreneurship in Poland. Its effective transfer to the higher education institutions participating in the Programme will take some time. What is already evident, however, are the benefits of the collaborative implementation scheme. From the perspective of an inexperienced lecturer in a small university located outside the major academic centres in Poland, launching an entrepreneurship course for students at a reasonably advanced level would be extremely difficult and time-consuming. The power of the network as developed in the Programme makes the whole process faster and more efficient. The planned creation of a European Network of Entrepreneurship Educators shall add an international dimension and strengthen the national collaborative efforts.

NOTES

1. This chapter draws on a paper which was presented at the Third International Conference on Economics, Law and Management, ICELM-3, ‘Petru Maior’ University of Tirgu-Mures, Romania, 4–6 June, 2008.

2. Both researchers and lecturers have struggled for many years with defining the borderline between the start-up phase and the day-to-day management of the young firm. The concept of the business platform, introduced by Davidsson and Klofsten, provide a way to measure the level of a newly established firm’s maturity and helps to resolve this issue (Davidsson and Klofsten 2003).

3. The Programme was initiated by the author in 2004 after he resumed an academic career that had been interrupted by a business engagement lasting 14 years. During 1990–2003, the author was engaged in establishing Ernst & Young, an audit and consultancy firm,
in Poland. During 1996–2000, he served as the managing partner of Ernst & Young
in Poland.

4. The issue of smaller firms which, due to various circumstances, at certain stages have
tempered their ambitions despite existing growth potential, calls for greater attention
of both researchers and the policy makers, particularly with the view of implementing
effective policy measures aimed at combating unemployment.

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