

# THE CONCEPTUAL SCHEME FOR MANAGING UNIVERSITY STAKEHOLDERS' SATISFACTION

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## Abstract

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Universities have to face many changes in the sector of higher education caused by the current dynamic development in this sector. With the decline in state support, increased competition and unfavourable demographic progress, universities are forced to establish and improve their relationships with new and existing stakeholders. Research on relationships among universities and stakeholders has historically focused on the different factors and their influence on improving stakeholder satisfaction with the quality of university services and on strengthening cooperation. Some studies are focused on stakeholders' classification according to their importance for higher education institutions. However, there are fewer scientific studies which concentrate on the intricacies of managing stakeholder satisfaction according to key areas of Universities. This study aims to design a conceptual scheme for managing stakeholder satisfaction depending on the importance of stakeholders in the key fields of Universities. The research was done in three steps. As the first stage, university stakeholders were identified via interview. In the second stage, the following key fields relating to university activities were identified via focus group – education, science and research, premises and technology. In the third stage, the importance of the particular stakeholders was identified for the fields mentioned in the stage two. In order to gain the necessary information, a set interview method was chosen. Native students were identified as the most important stakeholder for the field – education, academic staff as the most important for the field – research and development and enterprises as the most important stakeholder for the field – premises and equipment. The results of the research conducted provided the authors with a convenient base for formulating the conceptual scheme for managing stakeholder universities' satisfaction.

Keywords: universities, stakeholders, satisfaction, management, importance

## INTRODUCTION

“Universities, as the highest part of the educational system, are the top centres of learning, independent knowledge and creativity. They play a key role in the scientific, cultural, social and economic development of a society” (University Education Act, 2010).

As suggested by the definition, universities are centres of excellence in society. Therefore, it is necessary that their students and other stakeholders in society have the opportunity to profit from these institutions as much as possible, cooperate with them and participate in their further development.

There have been many changes in the field of tertiary education caused by dynamic advancement of this sector, both in a regional and global context. Universities face a lot of pitfalls these days, among which is increased competition and the economic measures in individual states (Wong, 2004; Hopkins and Todd, 2012; Kula, 2008) and in a global context as well. The tertiary education sector has to deal with changes in university funding (Dearden *et al.*, 2012) as well as unfavourable demographic progress in the field of European education – namely, that the number of students is decreasing. There have also been

changes in the funding of universities (Sojkin *et al.*, 2012).

However, in connection with the changes in the field of tertiary education, it is important to focus on the opportunities that are currently arising. Firstly, there is societal pressure to increase the level of education, opportunities to use modern ICT in the class as well as in communication among stakeholders. Secondly, opening the market and coordinating tertiary education within Europe (Budapest-Viennese declaration, 2010) has enabled universities to gain students from the global market. Last but not least, there has been pressure for closer cooperation between universities and the commercial sphere.

The pitfalls and opportunities described above require that the institutions of tertiary education enhance their competitive advantages. The factor affecting those competitive advantages is, according to Světlík (2009), mainly the “capital” of the school. The author adds that, “The capital of the school consists of its location, equipment, quality of the staff, skilled management, its know-how, high interconnection and good relations with its environment.” Světlík also states that maintaining good relations with its stakeholders enhances, among other benefits, the effectiveness of the school. Universities should therefore put cooperation with their stakeholders at the top of their priorities and try to get feedback on the quality of their services.

### Conceptual Frameworks – Stakeholder Approach

Freeman (1984) has defined the term of a stakeholder as “a group or a person who can influence or be influenced by an achieved goal of the organisation.” In his later study, he has also developed a matrix called “Stakeholder Strategy Matrix” (Freeman, Harrison and Wick, 2007). The matrix consists of two main powers – the potential of a stakeholder to cooperate with the organisation and the potential of a stakeholder to jeopardise the organisation. Based on these two powers, four strategies have been developed: a swing strategy, a defensive strategy, an offensive strategy and a hold strategy. This subject has been dealt with by many scientific studies. For example, Shao (2009), who focuses on the companies in the field of mass media, emphasises that applying the stakeholder approach in company management is beneficial especially from the long-term point of view. A company should try to be active in building and maintaining relations with its stakeholders – persistence is an important feature.

The aspect of time in company-stakeholder relations is dealt by Grinstein and Goldman (2009). They emphasise that the nature of the relationships between a company and its stakeholders changes in time and it is necessary to monitor the changes consistently and react to them.

Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) are defining normative theory of stakeholder identification and are explaining why to consider certain classes of entities as stakeholders. They propose the way to separate stakeholders from non-stakeholders. Their stakeholder identification model is based on three attributes: stakeholder’s power to influence the firm, the legitimacy of the stakeholder’s relationship with the firm and the urgency of the stakeholder’s claim on the firm. Based on these three attributes and their permutations they define seven stakeholder categories and one non-stakeholder category. They also explain prioritization of stakeholder relationships. They show that power alone is insufficient for high priority classification of the stakeholder. Legitimacy is necessary to provide authority, urgency is required for execution. Of course, stakeholder has to be aware of its power and has to be willing to act.

Welch and Jackson (2007) deal with the stakeholder approach in the field of internal communication. In the study, they introduce four dimensions of internal communication. These authors further add that it is convenient to use the stakeholder approach in the process of a communication audit or while getting feedback from individual lines of employees on their satisfaction with internal communication.

Zich (2008) is, in his scientific article, concerned how companies achieve success. In his work, he stresses the need for an organisation to define its behaviour towards its stakeholders in the course of achieving success. He defines three basic dimensions which may be used to assess the success of an organisation: the 3D notion of company success. Economic goals represent the first dimension, the second dimension is related to external stakeholders and the third dimension focuses on the relationship with internal stakeholders. Thus, Zich emphasises that “From the point of view of 3D assessment in the long-term success of a company, it is necessary that a company, during achieving its goals, satisfies those who are to be or must be satisfied.

### University Stakeholders

Universities are motivated differently compared to firms in their stakeholder approach. There are different sets of stakeholders relevant to them. In his PhD thesis, Bjørkquist (2009) emphasises that management of university can work in different ways depending on the owner of the university and presents four potential control modes in relation to university stakeholders. His work states the following division: an expert mode, a social mode, a negotiation mode and a business mode. For example state universities work more in social and negotiation mode in contrast with private universities which are run more in business mode. The division mentioned above mainly stems from Olsen’s research (2005). For every single one of the above mentioned modes, various

groups of stakeholders are defined as relevant. It is beneficial to divide stakeholders according to their priority as it allows university management to define concrete strategy for each group. Lester (2010) presents the following structure:

- Primary stakeholders – those who are responsible for proposing an evaluation system of the chancellor's work, its implantation of modification etc.
- Secondary stakeholders – groups who are directly affected by the chancellor's decision-making and act as occasional assessors of his or her work.
- Tertiary stakeholders – are rarely in contact with the chancellor, they do not usually act as assessors, but they are interested in the results of the chancellor's work.

It is clear from this division that stakeholders may be divided according to various criteria, factors and situations. Matlay (2010) also uses the division of university stakeholders into primary, secondary and tertiary. Stakeholder groups, who represent convenient partners for universities, create a relationship network of these institutions. It is necessary to make a decision concerning the frequency of contacts, causes, motives and so on with these stakeholders. Matlay also highlights that it is important to monitor the development of individual relationships – the life-cycle of relationships. It consists of these stages: the preparation stage, the first-contact stage, the growth stage, the maturity stage and the decline stage (Světlík, 2009). A university should try to satisfy primarily those stakeholders who are most important for achieving its targets. Newman and Petrosko (2011) in their article concluded it is important to concentrate on the stakeholder who can provide financial support to universities especially graduates who are donors, particularly donors with higher cumulative total giving and who are older.

### Satisfaction

Satisfaction appears most commonly in the context of the customer stakeholder where the satisfaction with services is being evaluated (Kotler *et al.*, 2007). The results of Cronin and Taylor's (1992) research prove that the quality of a service is closely bound with customer satisfaction. The notion of customer satisfaction in connection to marketing appeared in scientific studies in the 1960's (Levitt, 1960; Keith, 1960). In the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's, more and more studies dealt with this subject. In the early 1990's, Peterson and Wilson (1992) estimated that the number of articles dealing with this subject exceeded 15,000. At the beginning of the third millennium, Parker and Mathews' article (2001) may be considered revolutionary. These authors draw attention to the fact that the expression of satisfaction may have a different meaning depending on the purpose of use. In the marketing field, Parker and Mathews refer to two approaches

to the definition of customer satisfaction. The first notion leads to the definition where satisfaction is understood as a result of consumption. In the second notion, satisfaction is understood as a process.

In scientific studies, the issue of satisfaction with the quality of universities is most frequently linked with students. Many scientists emphasise that it is necessary to approach students of tertiary education as clients (Voss *et al.*, 2007; Cubillo, 2007; Ramachandran, 2010; Gruber *et al.*, 2010).

In Australia, this field has been studied by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2007), who draw attention to the fact that the quality of tertiary education is closely bound to the transformation of students. The transformation means the process of students' ability and skill enhancement in order to make them professionals who will contribute effectively to their future employers' goal achievement. The notion of quality in this sense is closely bound with the other stakeholders such as university staff or companies. The university staff try to constantly improve the processes connected to the education of the students. Employers are then interested in the graduates who leave the university ready to achieve the companies' goals etc. It stems from the article that what students expect from the university is, above all, that the university will provide them with quality education which enables them to succeed in their future professional career.

Gruber *et al.* (2010) created an evaluation framework of students' satisfaction with the quality of services at a university in Germany. Their research is based on the data which was collected in a survey carried out at a university. These authors stress that future research should focus on the evaluation of the other university stakeholders.

### Research Objective

On the basis of the findings mentioned above (Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Björkquist, 2009) the authors of this study consider significant to identify the key fields for university management and consequently to divide stakeholders into groups according to their importance in each field. As the result it will be possible to design the scheme that help the university to manage stakeholders' satisfaction.

Therefore, the aim of this work is the following:

**To design a conceptual scheme for managing universities' stakeholder satisfaction on the basis of their importance in the key fields.**

### Approach and Sample Description

In relation to the defined goal, the following procedure was chosen. As the first step, university stakeholders were identified using the method of interviews both in person and on the phone. 25 interviewees were asked (21 from the Czech Republic and 4 from Austria). 21 interviewees came from the 14 public universities in the Czech Republic: Masaryk University in Brno, University of Economics in Prague, University of South

Bohemia in České Budějovice, The Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, Czech University of Life Science in Prague, Mendel University in Brno, Brno University of Technology, Technical University of Ostrava, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí na Labem, Technical University of Liberec, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, University of West Bohemia in Plzeň, University of Hradec Králové, Silesian University in Opava. The other four interviewees came from Austria from the FH Wien-Studiengänge der WKW university. There are 15 women and 10 men among the interviewees. They were university management staff responsible for public relations of these institutions. The questions asked were the following: **Who are the stakeholders of the university?** The interviewees identified 17 stakeholders. A stakeholder was identified when it was mentioned by an interviewee. Below are listed all identified stakeholders:

1. Applicants;
2. Local students;
3. Foreign students;
4. Graduates;
5. University staff;
6. External staff;
7. Other institutes within the university (faculties, institutions, centres etc.);
8. Companies;
9. Other universities and faculties (competitors as well as potential partners);
10. Institutions of the public sector;
11. Professional public;
12. General public;
13. Other educational institutions (primary, secondary and other schools);
14. Mass media;
15. Suppliers;
16. Superior institution – Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports;
17. VIP company representatives or other institution representatives.

As the second stage, the following key fields related to university activities – **education, science and research, premises and technology** – were identified on the basis of a group interview. The group questioned consisted of four specialists who lecture the subjects of marketing or management at a university and participate in marketing management activities at the university at the same time.

The importance of identification of the key fields means that the university are able to set specific goals in the particular field in relation to their key stakeholders. It is important to highlight the fact that the field of **premises and technology** is understood as any university-owned possession or area which can be used otherwise than for classes only. This fact was emphasised to the interviewees before filling

in the form in order to identify the importance of the particular stakeholders for the key fields.

As the next step, the importance of the particular stakeholders was identified for the fields mentioned in point two. In order to gain the necessary information, a set interview method was chosen. For the purposes of the survey, 32 interviewees were asked. The questionnaire was filled in by 20 interviewees from the following European countries: the Czech Republic (6 interviewees), Germany (4 interviewees), Poland (2 interviewees), Austria (4 interviewees) and Slovakia (4 interviewees). The questionnaire was delivered by email or in person. The interviewees were specialists in marketing, public relations and foreign affairs. There were 12 women and 8 men. The interviewees came from the following universities: the Czech Republic: Brno University of Technology, Germany: Fachhochschule Jena, Universität Regensburg and Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München), (Poland – Jagellonska univerzita, AGH – Akademia Gorno – Hutnicza), (Austria – FH Wien-Studiengänge der WKW and WU – Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien) a Slovakia (Prešov University).

Arithmetic mean was used to classify the importance of the particular stakeholders. In the data processing, each group was assigned a number in the range of 1–5 according to the following logic: the stakeholder evaluated as the most important was assigned number 5, the stakeholder in second place got number 4, the group in third place got number 3, the group in fourth place number 2 and in fifth place, number 1. Using the values, the arithmetic mean was calculated. Based on the results, a hierarchical order of importance of the particular stakeholders was set. There were these three areas: **education, science and research, premises and technology**.

Classifications of the individual stakeholders for each field are shown below in graphic, numeric and verbal form. For the field of education, the five (more precisely six) most important stakeholders have been identified. The list below is ordered hierarchically according to the importance of the particular stakeholder. In fifth place there are two stakeholders, because the value of the arithmetic mean is the same. The table is supplemented by a graphic scheme.

For the field of science and research, five top stakeholders were identified. The list below is ordered hierarchically according to the individual stakeholders.

For the field of premises and technology, five top stakeholders were identified. The list below is ordered hierarchically according to the individual stakeholders. In fourth place there are two stakeholders, because the arithmetic mean of these groups is the same.

I: *Classification of importance of stakeholders – education*

Importance	Stakeholders	Arithmetic mean
1	Local students	4.3
2	Applicants	3.7
3	Academic staff	3.05
4	Foreign students	0.9
5	Other institutes within the university (faculties. institutions. centres etc.) Companies	0.5

II: *Classification of the importance of the stakeholders – science and research*

Importance	Stakeholders	Arithmetic mean
1	Academic staff	3.9
2	Companies	2.35
3	Professional public	2.25
4	Other institutes within the university (faculties. institutions. centres etc.)	1.8
5	Other universities and faculties (competitors as well as potential partners)	1.55

III: *The classification of the importance of the stakeholders – premises and technology*

Importance	Stakeholders	Arithmetic mean
1	Companies	2.65
2	Mass media	2.45
3	Local students	1.4
4	Other institutes within the university (faculties. institutions. centres etc.); Professional public	1.3
5	VIP company representatives or other institution representatives	1.2

### Hypotheses

From the perspective of stakeholders in the three fields of *education, science and research, premises and technology*, it is important to find out whether the distribution of the stakeholders is identical or not. Based on this, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**H0: There is no dependence (correlation) between the order of stakeholders in the particular fields.**

**H1: There is dependence (correlation) between the order of stakeholders in the particular fields.**

### Hypotheses Verification Methods

#### The Analyses of a Two-dimensional Data File

If we measure X and Y ranks (two random quantities, parts of a random vector X, Y), we call them a two-dimensional data file. The analysis of such a two-dimensional data file derived from the basic file depends on whether the monitored ranks are quantitative or qualitative.

In the following part, the analysis of a two-dimension qualitative data file is described using ordinal variables. The correlation of such ranks is expressed by Spearman's correlation coefficient (sometimes also called rank correlation coefficient) (Anděl, 2002).

### Spearman's Correlation Coefficient

In this article, the coefficient is based on the ranks of individual stakeholders ordered according to the values with regard to the both examined figures (stakeholders). Each stakeholder is assigned with a pair of X (rank in the first field) and Y (rank in the second field). If the value of the X rank rises the same way as the Y rank, the order of the stakeholders is the same. If the value of the X rank declines while the Y rank rises, the order of the ranks will reverse. If the values of both ranks are random, we can expect that both figures are independent.

For  $n$  observed pairs in the selection, it is possible to define Spearman's correlation coefficient using the differences of the rank  $d_i$  according to the formula:

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \times \sum_{i=1}^n d_i^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$$

If the ranks of stakeholders are identical, all values are  $d_i = 0$ , therefore  $r_s = 1$ . If the ranks are reverse, then  $r_s = -1$ . For the values  $r_s$  close to zero, we can presume that the rank of stakeholders is randomly jumbled and there is no dependence between the figures X and Y.

### The Test of Dependence of the Two Ranks

As the calculation of the correlation coefficient (the estimation of the real correlation coefficient  $\rho$ ) is based on the survey sampling, the estimation is rather inaccurate, as it is based on statistics, which is a random quantity. Using the survey sampling of the correlation coefficient  $r_s$  it is possible to test whether the observed figures are independent or dependent, in other words, if the correlation coefficient  $\rho$  equals zero or not.

The Zero Hypothesis of the independence test is formulated the way that the figures X and Y are independent. An alternative hypothesis means that these rankings are dependent. The variation coefficient of the  $r_s$  (random quantity) correlation is used as a test criterion. For the level of importance chosen  $\alpha$  is the critical part.

$$W_\alpha = \{r_s : |r_s| \geq r_\alpha(n)\},$$

where  $r_\alpha(n)$  is a critical value which may be found in statistical charts.

If the value of the tested criterion in the critical field is put into practice, the Zero Hypothesis is declined on  $100\alpha$  level and an alternative hypothesis is accepted.

In Tab. IV, the order of the importance of all stakeholders is summarised. As 17 stakeholders

have been identified, the top stakeholder group was assigned number 1. In contrast, the least important group was assigned 17. It is possible to find a decimal number (for example, in the field of education the VIP representatives and suppliers have the number 16.5), which signals that these two stakeholders are of equal importance. Rating the importance of stakeholders for individual fields stems from the method of arithmetic mean described above.

The order of the stakeholders in particular fields was compared via the medium of Spearman's correlation coefficient and the dependence test. The results are always for two fields and they are stated in the following table.

### DISCUSSION

It may be assumed from the second column of the table that there is a very slight dependence between the fields of Education – Science and Research. There is also a medium dependence between Science and Research – Premises and Technology. This hypothesis may be verified by an independence test. Zero Hypothesis states that there is no dependence in the order of the stakeholders within particular fields. If we compare the values of the second and third

IV: The order of the importance of all stakeholders

Stakeholders	Education	Science and research	Premises and technique
Applicants	2	16	12
Local students	1	10	3
Foreign students	4	11.5	14.5
Graduates	7	16	17
University staff	3	1	8
External staff	9.5	9	9.5
Other institutes within the university (faculties. institutions. centres etc.)	5.5	4	4.5
Companies	5.5	2	1
Other educational institutions (primary. secondary and other schools)	8	5	13
Institutions of the public sector	14	6	9.5
Professional public	11.5	3	4.5
General public	14	13.5	11
Other educational institutions (primary. secondary and other schools)	14	13.5	16
Mass media	11.5	11.5	2
Suppliers	16.5	16	7
Superior institution (Ministry of Education. Youth and Sports)	9.5	8	14.5
VIP company representatives or other institution representatives	16.5	7	6

V: The result of dependence test

Fields	Spearman's correlation coefficient $r_s$	Critical value $r_\alpha(n)$
Education – Science and Research	0.177	0.485
Education – Premises and Technology	0.040	0.485
Science and Research – Premises and Technology	0.472	0.485

The significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$

column, we can see that the correlation coefficient values are less significant than the critical values. So, the Zero Hypothesis applies to all field pairs. The order of the stakeholders in particular fields is independent. For this reason, it is meaningful that a university approaches each one of the identified fields (education, science and research, premises and technology) individually, taking into account monitoring and controlling its key stakeholders' satisfaction.

**Conceptual Scheme Design**

The results of the secondary and primary research provided the authors of the research with a convenient base for forming the conceptual scheme for managing satisfaction of the stakeholders with the quality services of universities.

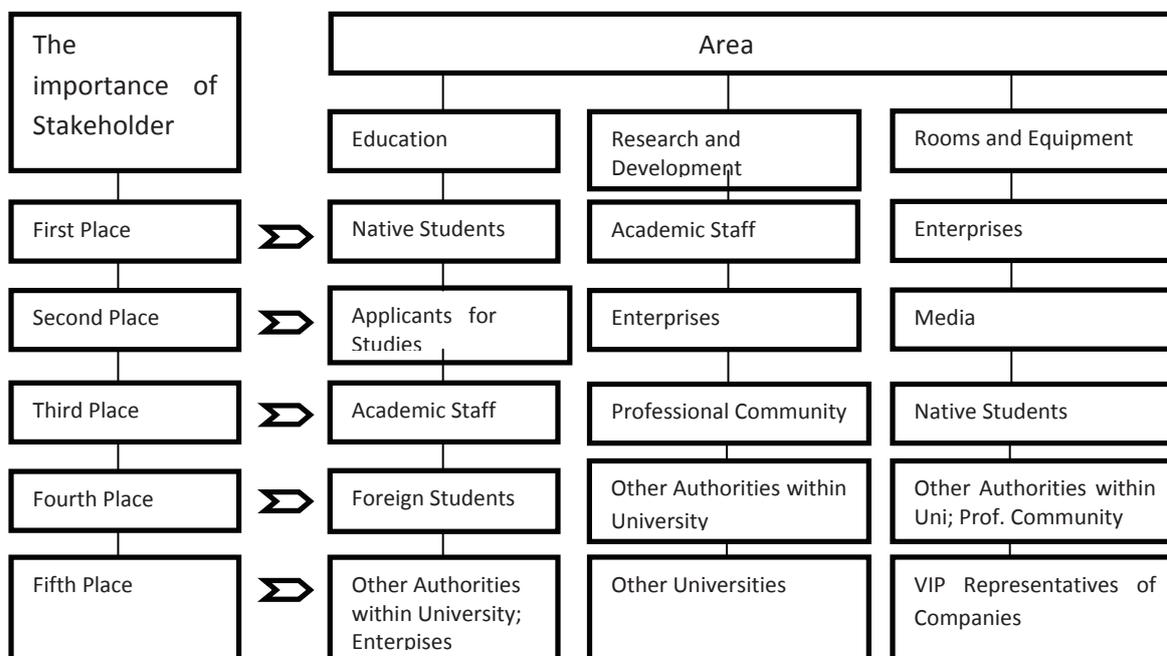
The purpose of the conceptual scheme is a formal description of a principle of the particular field – it is therefore a descriptive scheme. A conceptual

scheme is static (free of impact of time). It means that the identified objects and the connections between them exist on a principal, not momentarily or accidentally (Řepa, 2012).

According to Richardson (1996), the conceptual scheme copies the important fact of the reality and stems from its systematic approach. The system which describes the conceptual scheme has these characteristics:

- Purpose (goal) – *The purpose of a designed scheme is to manage stakeholders satisfaction' with the quality of services and facilities offered by universities*
- The structure made by the items of a system and relations between them – *The structure of the designed scheme consists of stakeholders, a university and mutual relations between them. The structure is also formed by individual key fields of a university.*

The Conceptual Scheme of the importance of university stakeholders for managing their satisfaction is shown in the following picture.



1: The conceptual scheme of the importance of university stakeholders for managing their satisfaction  
Source: the author's own diagram

**SUMMARY**

Universities face tougher and tougher competition. They must react flexibly to the changing pitfalls and opportunities in tertiary education. As a result, universities must lay stress on quality of service and make the best of their resources. These are the goals of the university management who, however, should not monitor only the satisfaction of its clients (students), but its stakeholders as well. It is not enough when a school monitors and controls its activities according to just one of the stakeholders only. In order to provide a quality service, it is essential to monitor its key stakeholder satisfaction in the key fields of its operation. The main contribution of this article is a proposal of a stakeholder satisfaction scheme, which enables a university to allocate its resources to those activities and fields, which will lead to an increase in key stakeholder satisfaction. This tool enables the university management to avoid unnecessary investments in those activities which are not the key. Apart from extending and cultivating the field of education, it is essential for universities to develop fully the field of science and research, which is the main factor driving further societal evolution (University Education Act,

2010). Making the best of premises and technical equipment may lead to getting additional financial resources, which the school might use for its further development and so enhance its competitive advantage. It stems from the conceptual model that, apart from the students who are the absolutely key stakeholders in the field of education, the university management should focus on academic staff satisfaction, which corresponds with the ideas published by Shun-Hsing Chen (2011). Academic staff is important not only for the field of education but also for the field of science and research. The companies are consequently an important stakeholder not only for the field of education or science and research but also for the field of premises and technology. The companies cooperate closely with universities co-finance mutual research (Veugelers and Cassiman, 2005). It is important to focus future research on new and more complex models of university stakeholder satisfaction, mainly because of the fast development and global growth of extensive competition in the field of the tertiary education. In accordance with this fact, further research should be carried out in the following fields:

- Creating methodologies to assess satisfaction with the quality of a university.
- Identification, design and development of convenient tools which would be used to control quality; implementation of a particular action enhancing the quality of university service.

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