

Privileged International Partnerships - PIPs

Jan Cornelis and Jacqueline Couder
November 2013

Preamble

This document contains a *circumscription* of what we mean by a Privileged International Partnership, PIP. A coherent and pertinent PIP definition is difficult to formulate and at this stage it is useless because PIPS are intentionally *tailor made* in addressing the specific needs, motivations and *shared vision* of the partners and may therefore be very diverse in content and structure. A rigid definition is counterproductive for establishing the joint ecosystem of flexible dynamics needed to shape *institution-wide* international relations in a fast changing global world. Moreover it takes (at least) two to tango.

Global challenges require global partnerships, and *deep going relations* require some PIP-wide *quality assurance approaches*, going beyond the borders of the individual institutions. Although we are aware that there is a huge amount of research talent all over the world, we are working selectively on a *limited set* of strong structural links with some leading universities. We carefully ensure that no limitations are imposed on research and *free inquiry* emanating from the initiative of individuals and research groups. This implies freedom of choice to collaborate with whoever is best suited. We also structurally support normal, focused partnership relationships emerging from bottom up initiatives. In the context of the PIPS, however, we do something more at the inter-institutional level to facilitate, support and offer preferential conditions for collaboration.

PIP links should go *beyond purely academic relations*. Joint research, exchange of best practices for high-quality teaching and learning programs, staff and student exchanges, high-profile workshops and conferences are the basic prerequisites for the PIP creation. A PIP should have a certain *scale*, crossing borders of individual faculties and research groups, *reaching out towards external regional and international stakeholders* like companies, incubators of new economic activity (e.g. for coaching and housing spin offs, technology platforms, joint laboratories, ...), non-profit organizations, government agencies, independent research institutes, cultural organisations (e.g. musea) or academies.

<p>We expect that in the future the universities' network will become <i>the instrument and the natural ecosystem</i> in which all actors involved will operate, collaborate and move naturally, rather than the individual universities ... the network will be in essence international and based on strong relationships (e.g. PIPs)</p>

Typical PIP layers of collaboration

A full-fledged international privileged partnership is typically structured following the *three layered concept*, depicted in Figure 1 below, so that the synergy between the regional interests and the triple university's mission (education, R&D and societal impact creation)

accelerates and increases the creation of societal, cultural and economic value which in its turn intensifies the R&D and educational/training collaboration.

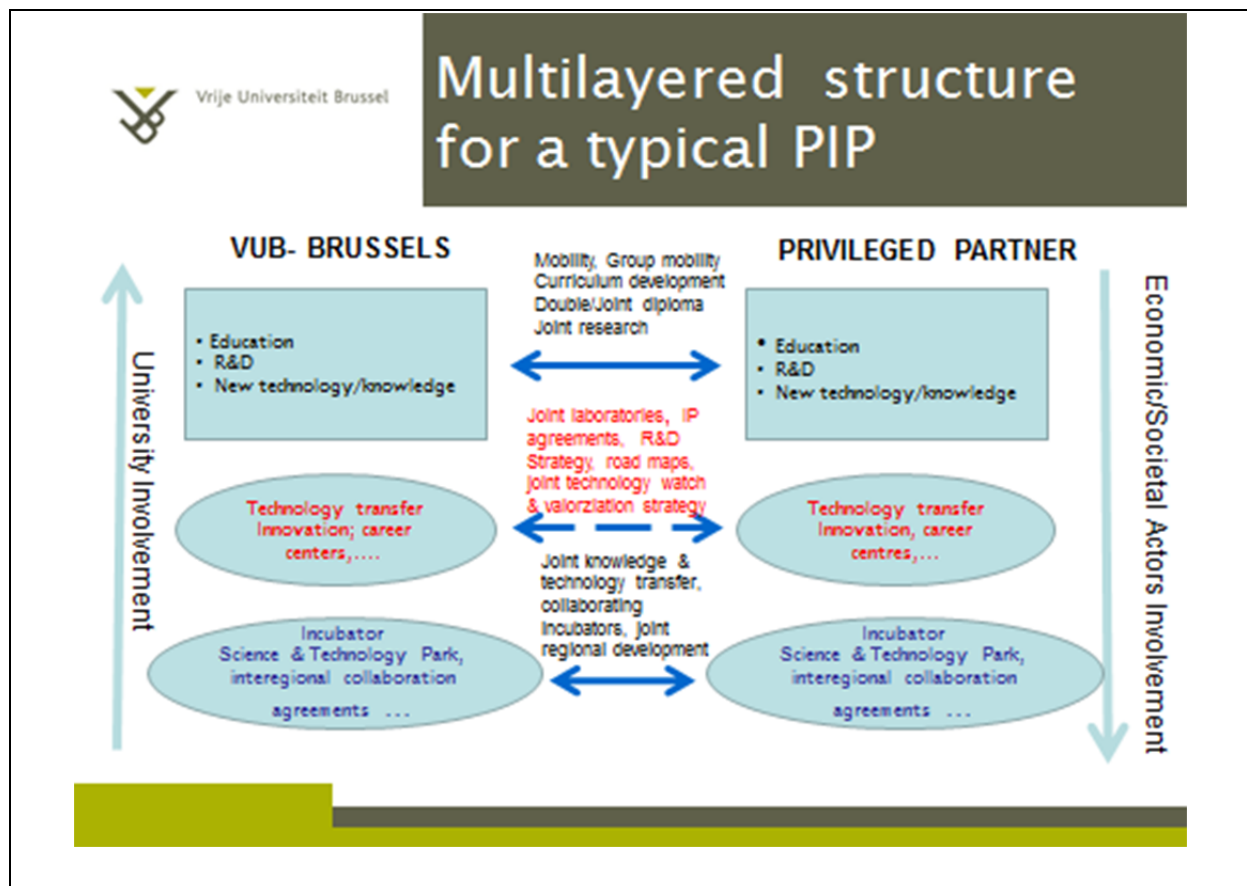


Figure 1: Three layered structure of a typical PIP and the synergistic coupling between the layers.

Layer 1: relations between universities usually start from joint research interests, individual student exchange (e.g. Erasmus and other mobility grant programs), followed by curriculum analysis for credit recognition (e.g. ECTS), more in depth educational collaboration, **group mobility**, joint and/or double diploma definition, joint coaching of PhDs, PhD double diplomas (e.g. co-tutelles), joint publications and postdoctoral exchanges. Also **summer/winter school** collaboration is an essential joint activity for creating further incentives for exchanges, mobility and community building.

Figure 2 summarizes the benefits of group mobility as an intermediate evolution state in the Layer 1 elaboration of a PIP.

MOBILITY extended by STRUCTURED (GROUP) MOBILITY

Group mobility

- Planned exchange with limited number of partner universities: incoming and outgoing **groups**, rather than **individual** mobility.

Organisational aspects

- good knowledge of procedures of the partner university
- fixed mobility window in the curricula
- less administrative hurdle (no individual files)
- better control of quality assurance
- less effort to mobilise students
- services (housing) can be well regulated
- students experience less anxiety effects (> < individual)
- sense of inclusion in the joint community
- higher success rates

22

Figure 2: Benefits that may be obtained from group mobility as an intermediate stage towards the elaboration of double and/or joint diplomas (Layer 1).

Layer 2: consists of a parallel collaboration track on knowledge-, innovation- and technology transfer, including a.o. the creation of *joint laboratories* as a structure in which *intense* research collaboration of a *substantial scale* is organized under *mixed leadership*. Such a joint laboratory can be governed simply by a bilateral agreement, but might sometimes require an independent legal structure for coherent access to funding channels (e.g. in China, MOST and EU funding). The joint laboratory structure has to be supported in the *communication strategy* of the PIP partners. Activities in Layer 2 typically include, (i) the creation of *joint IP* and/or patent portfolio pooling, (ii) joint *technology watch* and prospection for *valorization* of the R&D results and acquired skills in the society at large, (iii) a joint research agenda or road map. This collaboration track, parallel to pure research and education, will in its turn accelerate and give more weight to the joint R&D between knowledge institutes and universities of both regions. In Layer 2 *new talent creation* is essential and collaboration between *career centers* of the partners has to be envisaged.

Layer 3: This layer is about joint knowledge/technology transfer and includes a.o. the establishment of agreements between our *incubators* for high tech and/or service companies, in order to make it easier for them to acquire international markets or implant R&D antennas abroad. The layer touches upon inter-regional development and is supported by *an interregional framework agreement on administrative, cultural and economic activities in chosen areas*.

The interplay between the three layers is partially driven by (1) top down initiatives emanating from economic imperatives and regional policies and priorities, and (2) bottom up actions emanating from the areas of excellence in R&D and creative researchers & innovators. The top down processes typically are demand-driven and initiated by the regional government and economic actors. The bottom-up processes are offer-driven and initiated by knowledge centers, mainly universities. Figure 3 sketches the typical causal relations and mutual influences among the activities that can be taken up in a PIP. Not everything that is

mentioned above should necessarily be taken up in each PIP, but we expect activity to present in each of the three layers.

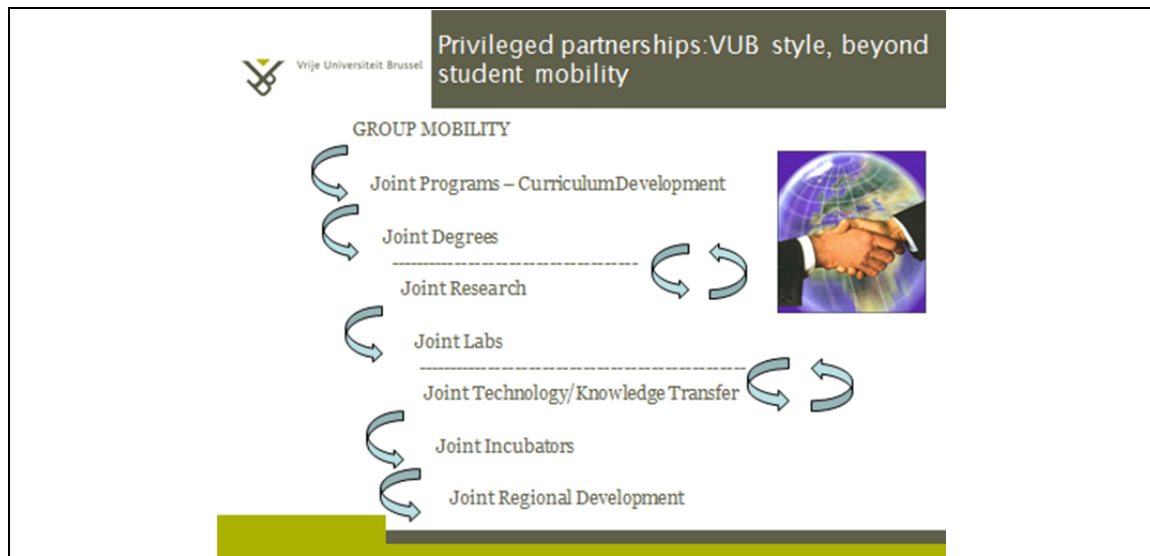


Figure 3: Education, Research, the typical causal relations in building up privileged partnerships.

PIPs ... Why?

- Problems and challenges are often becoming global in some sense and increasingly complex. *Expertise, know how, skills, infrastructure and equipment can often not be found locally* because there are almost never mono disciplinary solutions to the global problems of Planet Earth. Finding solutions in this area is getting more and more urgent. The urgency also causes an increased societal and economic value to new concepts and solutions to these global problems, and therefore simultaneous actions are required at the different layers sketched in Figure 1.

- Strong binding between respected and quality seeking international partners supports the efforts made to enhance the *international profile of the university as a meaningful key player*.

- PIPs are expected to lead to *more efficient and effective governance*, through better understanding and knowledge about the partners' internal organization and structures, procedures, regulations and governance so that the management of joint projects and programs can be made more efficient based on trust and mutual accountability. This is a prerequisite for *exchanging best practices* that - in a longer time perspective - will lead to an increase in effectiveness.

- Better implementation of the *international aspects of the institutional governance* for R&D, education, student affairs, impact creation on society, originating from collaborations in a well-defined framework.

- *Better opportunities* offered, in an international context, to students (e.g. Figure 2), researchers and teachers.

- **Collaboration of career centres**, supporting the new paradigm with which our students will be confronted, namely “continue to be able to act locally but also think, operate and feel at home globally”.

- PIPs as ideal instrument to match the expectations of the EU that is orienting more and more **important amounts of funding on an institutional basis** rather than on individual merit and quality.

PIPs ... Choices?

- Chosen by Faculties jointly, **in collaboration** with the International Relations and Mobility Office (IRMO).

- Main criterion: **quality** of partner, comparable or better, taking into account the variability, specialization and thematic reputation of excellence.

- **Networks** in which the PIP partner is involved.

- **Compatibility in vision** on research, education and impact creation.

- **Relational criteria** including a mixture of success in the already existing collaboration, complementarity leading to synergies for achieving common goals, future opportunities, success of collaboration in capacity building (e.g. in development aid programs)

- Although we have no particular regional focus or specific country policies: **geographic spread**, mainly taken into account in top down initiatives of IRMO (e.g. compliance to government priorities, opportunities emanating from societal analysis, network priorities, ...).

Pips ... the P from privileged?

- We are talking about **institutional partnerships**: collaboration in different domains, academic/administrative, and in the diverse missions and duties of Bologna compatible universities.

- A **signed cooperation agreement** in the framework of an MoU is present.

- An agreement is made about **mutual advertising** of the privileged partnership on websites, brochures and in the internal/external communication.

- **Primary values** are: striving towards the highest quality standards in all processes, innovation, creativity, sustainability, critical attitude that is not hampered by pre-established dogmas and religious constraints; tolerance; respect for diversity in opinions, persons and societal models.

- The first **P** in PIPs means that the partners agree on **preferential communication** and offer for participation in new initiatives and projects whenever appropriate or feasible.

- **Incentives for joint initiatives** come from both partners: staff mobility, seminars, promo-activities,...

- External funding (grant systems, project money) are used for *privileged allocation* to joint initiatives.
- *Continuous evolution* towards extension of the collaboration is observable: e.g. student/staff mobility, joint educational programs, joint PhDs, research collaboration, joint laboratories, technology transfer, incubator agreements.
- *Administrative collaboration*: exchange of good practices, mutual working and training visits.
- Partners look for *regional support* or use existing regional agreements to intensify and consolidate the collaboration.
- Policy and decision makers have **periodical meetings**, aside from the normal communication in the network workplace
- Own *networks are opened* to the partner whenever feasible, desirable or effective.
- A *dedicated coordinator* is assigned in each partner university. A *joint coordinator*, affiliated to both partner universities, is also possible.

PIPs .. current status?

- Local PIPs with international outreach

- UGent-VUB Alliance
- Brussels University Alliance (ULB-VUB)

- International PIPs

- Northwestern Polytechnic University (NPU), Xi'an, China (supported by the bilateral agreement between the Municipality of Xi'an and the Brussels Capital Region).

The list hereafter is not exhaustive and it is unlikely that all emerging partnerships opportunities, mentioned below, will evolve to real PIPs. The list is dynamic and new universities might appear while others can disappear. Nevertheless, we took the option to list some examples to illustrate that we are not talking about “empty box PIP formation”.

- International PIPs under construction

- Sichuan University (Chengdu- China)
- Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV) and Universidad de Oriente (Las Villas and Santiago de Cuba, Cuba)

- Partnerships that could evolve towards PIPs

- RUG, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
- Maastricht Universiteit
- Lublijana University
- Patras University