STRATEGIZING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.
The Role and Challenges of Mission Statements

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37th Annual EAIR Forum Krems 2015
***"From Here to There: Positioning Higher Education Institutions"*,**
August 30-September 02, 2015, Danube University Krems, Austria

Track 5: *Visions, Missions and Values*

➢ **Motivation**

➢ **Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategy**

➢ **(Preliminary) Results**
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The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization

Peter F. Drucker (2008)

- **What is our mission?**
- **Who is our customer?**
- **What does the customer value?**
- **What are our results?**
- **What is our plan?**

Motivation

- **Strategizing is a "wicked" problem** (Camillus 2008; Rittel & Webber 1973) – everywhere

- **HEIs are complicated**: "organizational anarchies" (Cohen & March, 1974), "loosely coupled institutions" (Weick 1976), "quite inward looking" and narcissistic organizations (Stensaker 2015)

- Could **HEIs** be modeled as coherent, **purposeful organizations** to any greater extent?

- Seems that a relevant number of HEIs worldwide are transforming into more competitive organizational actors (Kosmützky & Krücken 2015): establish individual profiles (self-understanding, competitive abilities, positioning in HE "market") represented in **structure and development plans** and **mission statements** as instruments of strategic and organizational development

- Are **mission statements notoriously vague and empty and exchangable**, or do they really represent an **integral and unique part of identity building, profiling and strategizing in HEIs**?

- What are **relevant contents and items of mission statements? How are mission statements utilized**?

Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategy

A viable definition of *mission statement*:

*"A mission statement defines in a paragraph or so **any entity's reason for existence**. It embodies its **philosophies, goals, ambitions and mores**. Any entity that **attempts to operate without a mission statement runs the risk of wandering through the world without having the ability to verify that it is on its intended course"** (MS 2015).

A mission statement "reflects the **ultimate distillation of the strategic activity of the institution**", or it is the **source** from which the **basics of the institution's strategy** can be derived (JISCinfoNet 2012).

It should be realistic in giving a summary why the institution exists and what it does; it should be unique to the institution/organization; it should be conceptually as concise and catchy and short as possible so that at least its key elements (even if not the exact wording) is memorable; and it should be current (though relatively stable) (also cf. JISCinfoNet 2012).
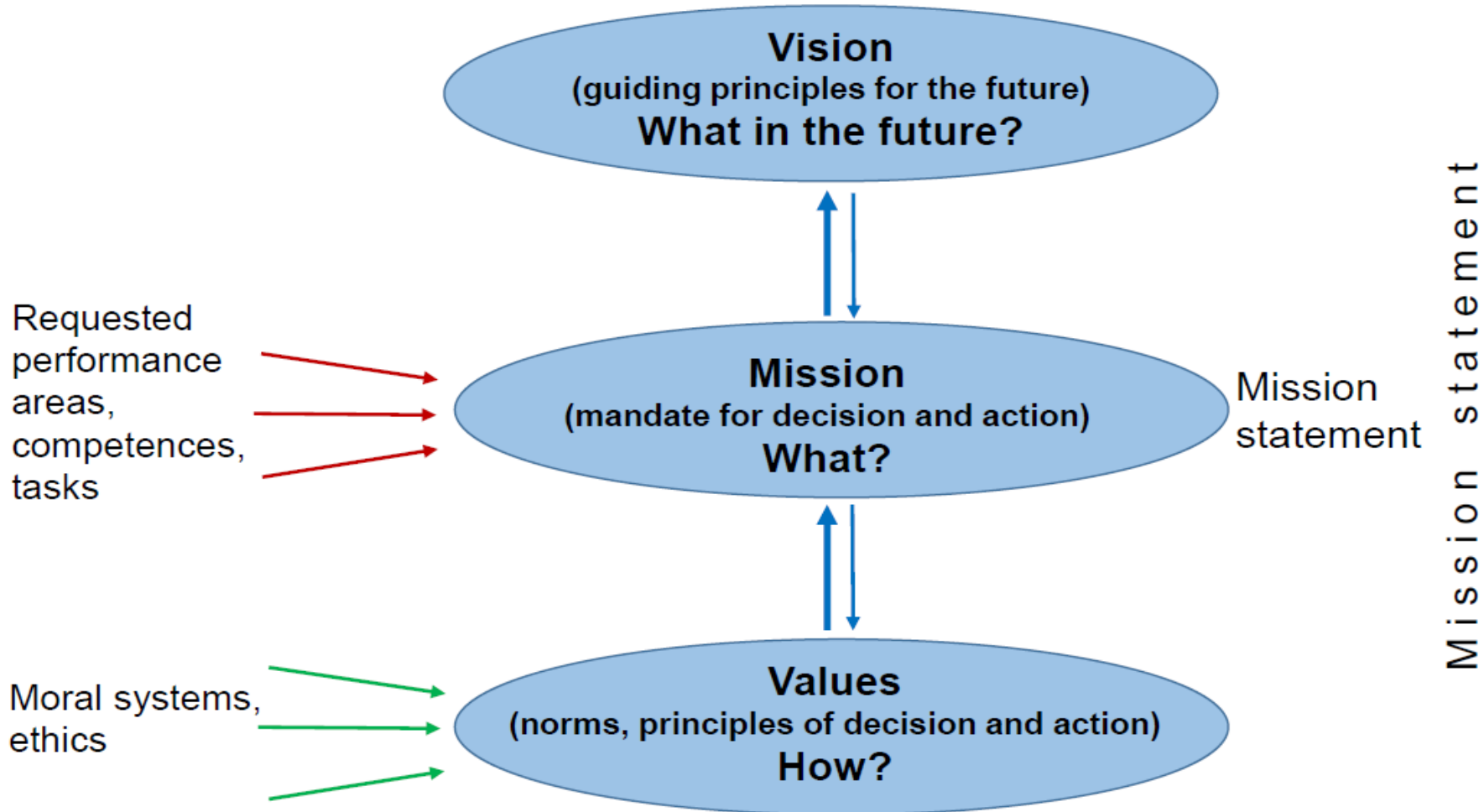
Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategy

Figure 1: Formal structural relation between values, mission and vision (schematic)

Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategy

How can a complicated social organization, such as an HEI, establish such a wicked thing like a strategy?
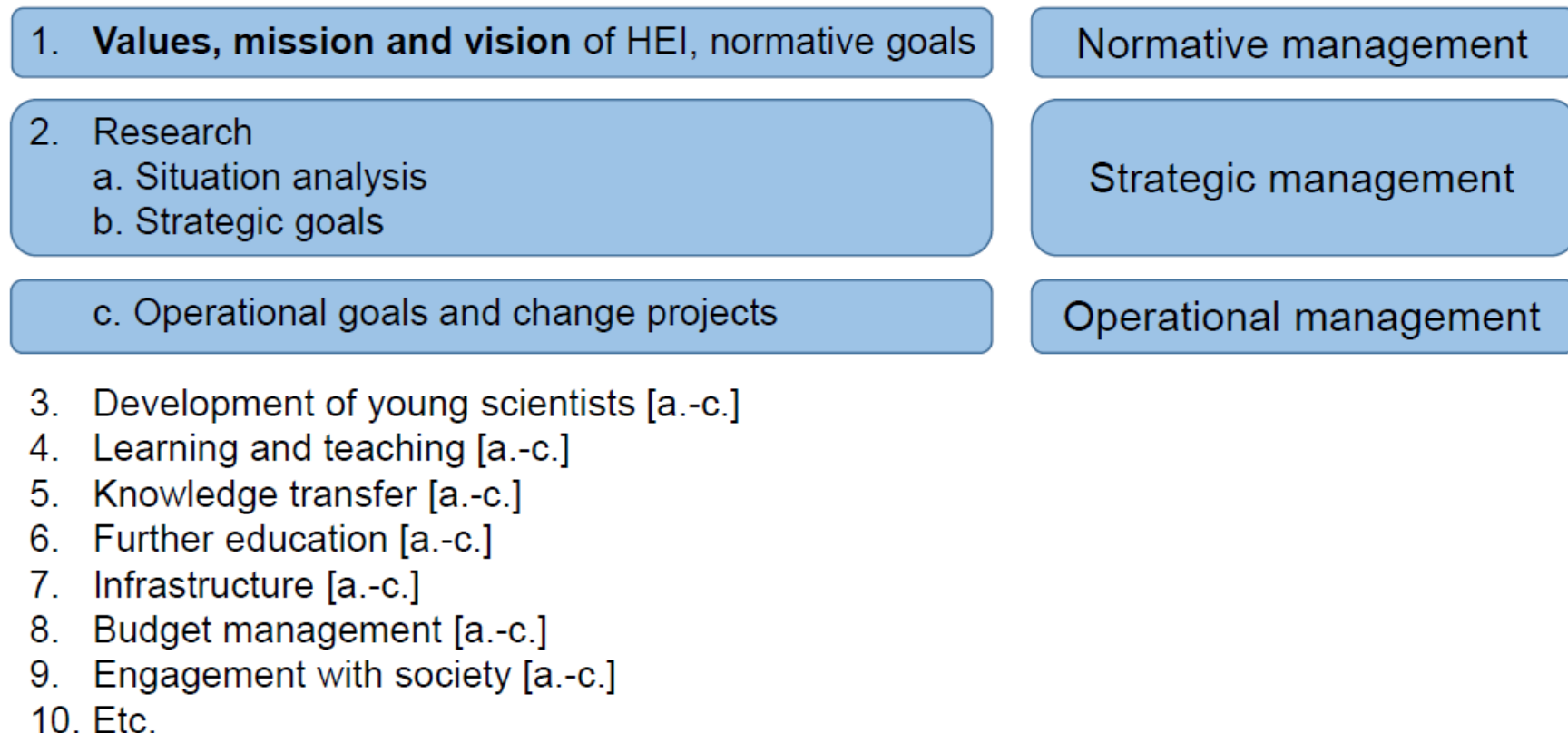
1. **Values, mission and vision** of HEI, normative goals	Normative management
2. Research a. Situation analysis b. Strategic goals	Strategic management
c. Operational goals and change projects	Operational management

3. Development of young scientists [a.-c.]
4. Learning and teaching [a.-c.]
5. Knowledge transfer [a.-c.]
6. Further education [a.-c.]
7. Infrastructure [a.-c.]
8. Budget management [a.-c.]
9. Engagement with society [a.-c.]
10. Etc.

Figure 2: Outline of a HEI strategy (schematic) (after Zechlin 2010, Fig. 3)
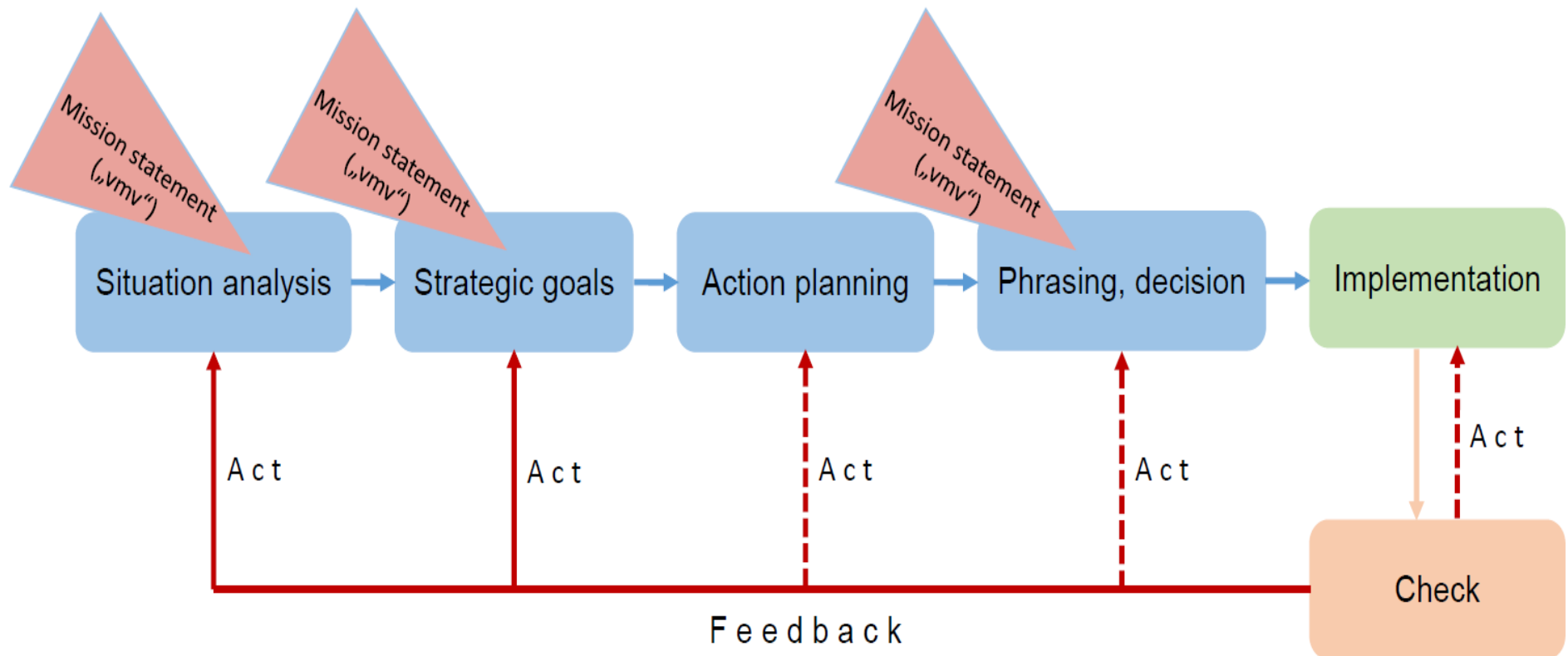
Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategy

Figure 3: Values, mission and vision ("mission statement") in the strategic process (schematic) (also cf. Zechlin 2010, Fig. 1)

Methodology and (Preliminary) Results
Conceptual Analysis of Mission Statements of 29 sample HEIs

Table 1: Set of possible, relevant characteristics (63) of mission statements

(Quality) Teaching & learning
(Quality) Research
Promote young scientists & artists
Further education (LLL)
Promote equal opportunities for women and men
Research-based teaching & learning
Focus disciplines in teaching
Focus disciplines in research
Integration into a free, democratic and social state of law
Prepare students for [qualified] professional activities
Support students in conducting internships (in cooperation with industry and other employers)
Support graduates in the transition to working life
Promote internationalisation/ international (in particular European) cooperation
Cooperation with other HEIs and with public or publicly promoted institutions of research and education
Take into account the special needs of foreign students
Advise students and those wishing to study about study facilities, content, structure and requirements of study
Promote the connection to the HEI's graduates/ alumni
Offer social support for students
Foster ability for social engagement
Personality development as education goal
Take into account/promote the diversity of HEI members and staff in the performance of their duties

Contribute to societal progress by promotion of knowledge transfer, design transfer and technology transfer

Contribute to societal progress by implementation of the results of research and development into practice

Contribute to societal progress by giving free access to scientific information

Make regular and published assessments of the HEI's achievements in research, teaching, promotion of young scientists and equal opportunities for women and men by participating students and publish the assessment results

Regularly inform the public concerning the fulfilment of the HEI's duties and achieved results

Establish a quality management system [and carry out QA]

Commitment to freedom of research and teaching

Commitment of all science on truth

Commitment to the principles of good scientific practice

Unity of research and teaching

Promote European study programs

Promote specific methodologies and design in teaching & learning

Promote interdisciplinarity (general)

Interdisciplinary teaching

Interdisciplinary research

Innovation

Mediation of interdisciplinary key qualifications

Promote transdisciplinarity (general)

Promote socially responsible business practices

Promote equal opportunities for all HEI members

Promote a cooperative organisation culture

Promote compatibility of study, research and professional work with family responsibilities

Promote cooperation with HEI-external research and industry

Promote societal responsibility/ cooperation with society

Promote commitment to the region

Refer to founding conditions of HEI (e.g., technical university, reform university, academic heroes)

Promote openness against international competition

Promote international teaching

Refer to geographical position or locality

Promote sustainability

Refer to organisational specificities

Promote autonomy and profile building of HEIs

Operate staff development

Support external fundraising

Take care of private sponsors

Offer efficient services to all HEI members

Offer services to students, in general

Take care of non-traditional students

Educate executives

Management/ administration supports scientists

Operate financial management

Operate risk management

Test novel and further developed structures (e.g., in organisation, leadership, decision-making, efficiency, profile building, adjustment to legitimate specific requirements of the HEI) ("development clause" of HE law, LUBW 2014, § 76 (1))

Table 2: Competences and goals (20 out of 63) as recorded in mission statements and percentages of sample HEIs advocating those competences and goals

Prescribed by HE law		Not prescribed by HE law
Federal law	State law	
Teaching & learning: 100 % Unis / 67 % UASs		Innovation: 56 % Unis / 38 % UASs
Research: 100 % Unis / 67 % UASs		Promote European study programs: 33 % Unis / 24 % UASs
Promote young scientists: 89 % Unis / 29 % UASs		Promote specific methodologies in teaching & learning: 22 % Unis / 5 % UASs
Further education: 44 % Unis / 57 % UASs		Promote a cooperative organization culture: 56 % Unis / 52 % UASs
Promote equal opportunities for women and men: 89 % Unis / 38 % UASs		Promote autonomy and profile building of HEIs: 11 % Unis / 0 % UASs
Support graduates in transition to working life: 33 % Unis / 24 % UASs		Operate staff development: 11 % Unis / 5 % UASs
Promote international cooperation/ internationalisation: 89 % Unis / 91 % UASs		Take care of private sponsors: 22 % Unis / 0 % UASs
Take into account the special needs of foreign students: 11 % Unis / 10 % UASs		Take care of non-traditional students: 22 % Unis / 10 % UASs
Advise students: 11 % Unis / 10 % UASs		Operate financial management: 11 % Unis / 5 % UASs
Contribute to societal progress by promotion of transfer of knowledge and technology 67 % Unis / 76 % UASs		
Test novel and further developed structures (LUBW 2014, § 76): 0 % Unis / 0 % UASs		

Table 2: percentages of sample HEIs advocating various selected competences and goals as recorded in mission statements; green background indicates six "ubiquituous standard" (Kosmützky & Krücken 2015, p. 11) competences and goals recorded in mission statements.

According to Table 2 the study reveals, for example:

- Mission statements of all sample universities share commitment to quality research and teaching; for sample UASs this is (only) true for 67 % (i.e., one third of UASs do not mention these most basic items in mission).

- None of sample HEIs reduces mission statement to the six "ubiquituous standard" characteristics – teaching; research; promotion of young scientists; further education; promotion of equal opportunities for women and men; innovation. There are other important characteristics emerging.

- It is **not** true that mission statements contain **only items which are legally prescribed anyway** [a criticism of (Meyer-Guckel & Mägdefessel 2010, p. 1) which referred to often found commitments of German HEIs to the unity of research and teaching (80 % of all German HEIs), promotion of young scientists (94 %), internationalization (85 %), interdisciplinarity (82 %) and cooperation with industry and society (82 %)].

- As far as the written word of mission statements is concerned, it seems that in certain respects, **profile building could be intensified in many HEIs** (e.g., promote European study programs; promote specific teaching methodologies; support internships; support graduates in transition to working life; take care of non-traditional students; promote HEI autonomy and profile building; financial management; test novel structures).

- There are some differences between comprehensive universities and UASs which are, however, probably not of that great importance.

(Preliminary) Results
Conceptual Analysis of Mission Statements of 29 sample HEIs

Table 3: Seven clusters of HEI competences and goals as recorded in mission statements and degree of fulfilment (percentage) in 19 (out of 29) sample HEIs (colours from green to red indicate transition from high to low fulfilment)

HEI	Seven clusters of HEI competences and goals as recorded in mission statements						
	Legally prescribed (total 27)	Not legally prescribed (total 37)	Teaching and student oriented (total 28)	Research oriented (total 13)	Society oriented (total 23)	Organizational development oriented (total 12)	Service oriented (total 11)
1	33 %	30 %	36 %	69 %	22 %	8 %	0 %
2	48 %	41 %	46 %	92 %	44 %	17 %	9 %
3	56 %	30 %	50 %	69 %	39 %	33 %	9 %
4	59 %	32 %	50 %	69 %	44 %	42 %	18 %
5	52 %	46 %	43 %	62 %	52 %	33 %	18 %
6	41 %	27 %	46 %	46 %	44 %	17 %	9 %
7	37 %	35 %	36 %	69 %	35 %	17 %	0 %
8	67 %	49 %	68 %	62 %	61 %	42 %	56 %
9	33 %	22 %	46 %	62 %	13 %	0 %	18 %
11	41 %	22 %	29 %	31 %	30 %	17 %	9 %
15	30 %	3 %	18 %	23 %	13 %	8 %	0 %
16	30 %	24 %	32 %	23 %	48 %	8 %	0 %
17	30 %	32 %	46 %	46 %	39 %	0 %	0 %
19	26 %	19 %	21 %	31 %	26 %	0 %	0 %
20	11 %	19 %	25 %	31 %	9 %	0 %	18 %
21	22 %	14 %	25 %	23 %	22 %	8 %	18 %
23	11 %	11 %	11 %	8 %	17 %	8 %	18 %
28	19 %	14 %	7 %	8 %	22 %	17 %	0 %
29	19 %	16 %	14 %	8 %	22 %	0 %	0 %

Table 3 presents the degree of fulfilment (percentage) of seven clusters of HEI competences and goals as recorded in mission statements by comparing 19 (out of 29) sample HEIs:

(i) 27 (out of a total of 63) competences/ goals which are legally prescribed;

(ii) 37 competences/ goals which are not legally prescribed;

(iii) 28 teaching and student oriented competences/goals;

(iv) 13 research oriented competences/goals;

(v) 23 society oriented competences/goals;

(vi) 12 competences/goals oriented at organizational development;

(vii) 11 service oriented competences/goals.

(Some competences/goals are elements of more than one cluster.).

According to Table 3 the study reveals, for example:

- Mission statements of comprehensive **universities** are **very much research oriented**. However, they also represent well orientation towards **teaching**, **students**, **society**. Orientation towards **organizational development** and, even more so, towards **services** is significantly **lower** represented.

- In general, degree of fulfilment of seven clusters of HEI competences and goals is **lower in UASs** as compared to comprehensive universities.

- Core areas of **teaching and learning and research are rather weakly** represented in mission statements of **UASs** (while, in contradistinction to comprehensive universities, these areas are relatively balanced in UASs).

- Seems obvious that, as far as explicit representation in mission statements is concerned, UASs could develop in all areas, and UASs as well as universities **could improve** in particular in items referring to **organizational development** and **service orientation**.

Criticism: meaningfulness of mission statements in HEIs is low, e.g.:

Mission statements of German HEIs

➢ do not serve as orientation for potential students;

➢ do not serve as demarcations towards competitors;

➢ do not serve as "conviction papers" towards private sponsors;

➢ do not supply an adequate basis for strategic organizational development;

➢ very much seem to address the members of the HEI who are already quite familiar with their institution;

➢ often are too vague and unspecific and lack profile building guiding ideas

(Meyer-Guckel & Mägdefessel 2010)

Structured Interviews

How important are, in your opinion, the **following functions** of mission statements?

	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Completely unimportant
Defining purposes and goals of the HEI	X	X	□	□
Profiling the HEI against competitors	□	□	□	□
Communicating the core profile of the HEI	X	X	□	□
Orientation/information for potential students	□	□	□	□
Orientation/information for potential cooperation partners	□	□	□	□
Orientation/information for potential academic staff	□	□	□	□
Orientation/information for potential international "customers" (e.g., students; academics; cooperation partners)	□	□	□	□
Providing a framework for profile building in faculties and departments	X	X	□	□
Defining an organizational image ("how others see the organization")	□	□	□	□
Defining an organizational identity ("how members perceive their organization": self-conception/self-image)	X	X	□	□
Serving as a consensual basis for organizational action	□	□	□	□
Supporting strategic management and governance [e.g., improve HEI profile; guide (re-)structuring of HEI subunits; guide resource allocation]	□	□	□	□
Picking up interests of HEI-internal stakeholders	□	□	□	□
Picking up interests of HEI-external stakeholders	□	□	□	□
Fulfilling quality assurance and evaluation requirements	□	□	□	□
Serving public relations and marketing	□	□	□	□
Other, namely	□	□	□	□

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Does the mission statement of your HEI fulfill the following functions?

	Fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Unfulfilled
Defining purposes and goals of the HEI	☐	☐	☐
Profiling the HEI against competitors	☐	☐	☐
Communicating the core profile of the HEI	☐	☐	☐
Orientation/information for potential students	☐	☐	☐
Orientation/information for potential cooperation partners	☐	☐	☐
Orientation/information for potential academic staff	☐	☐	☐
Orientation/information for potential international "customers" (e.g., students; academics; cooperation partners)	☐	☐	☐
Providing a framework for profile building in faculties and departments	☐	☐	☐
Defining an organizational image ("how others see the organization")	☐	☐	☐
Defining an organizational identity ("how members perceive their organization": self-conception/self-image)	☐	☐	☐
Serving as a consensual basis for organizational action	☐	☐	☐
Supporting strategic management and governance [e.g., improve HEI profile; guide (re-)structuring of HEI subunits; guide resource allocation]	☐	☐	☐
Picking up interests of HEI-internal stakeholders	☐	☐	☐
Picking up interests of HEI-external stakeholders	☐	☐	☐
Fulfilling quality assurance and evaluation requirements	☐	☐	☐
Serving public relations and marketing	☐	☐	☐
Being realistic in giving a summary why the institution exists and what it does	☐	☐	☐
Other, namely	☐	☐	☐

Follows from interviews with sample HEIs: mission statements

➤ Are developed in **participatory** processes (comprising in some cases online fora open to all HEI members);

➤ Are (now, in recent times) **used on a regular basis** in recruitment processes, admission procedures, meetings of the senate, HEI council, rectorate, faculty councils etc.;

➤ Are seen as **"very important" or "important"** in following functions: defining purposes and goals of HEI; defining organizational identity ("how members perceive their organization"); providing framework for profile building in faculties; communicating core profile of HEI;

➤ **None** of the mentioned functions is seen as **"completely unimportant"**

Follows from interviews with sample HEIs:

➢ Mission statements address interests of (potential) students (learning and teaching quality etc.) but designers of mission statements are rather sceptical whether mission statements are decisive information sources used by students (e.g., when they choose their favourite HEI);

➢ **Profiling function** of mission statements against competitors:

  ❖ is **not seen as that important:** on the scale "very important", "important", "unimportant" and "completely unimportant" the last assessment is never given but all the others occur;

  ❖ No interview partner says this profiling function is "fulfilled" at her/his HEI; instead it is either (in most cases) "partially fulfilled" or "unfulfilled";

WHAT iS YOUR
MiSSiON ?

Follows from interviews with sample HEIs:

➢ Mission statements do not serve as "conviction papers" towards private sponsors, but this goals is still not a systematic and explicit part of the HEIs' general strategy process as reflected in the mission statements. It may, however, very well be the case that an HEI shows such activities on other organizational levels (such as faculties and departments);

➢ Claim that mission statements do not serve as an adequate basis for strategic organizational development is only true if the mission statement remains a lifeless document; the interviewees from the sample HEIs are well aware of this problem

WHAT iS YOUR MiSSiON ?

Follows from interviews with sample HEIs:

➢ The critique that mission statements are (almost) exclusively addressed to the HEI members seems not to be true – although usually the self-image is more in the focus of mission statements than the outside-image (organizational image).;

➢ Mission statements of some of the sample HEIs have been **revised substantially recently** (within the last five years or so) or are just now in the process of revision

➢ All interviewees see the mission statement of their HEIs as concise and catchy, comprising profiling capacities, realistic and not outdated.

Summary and Conclusions

Study shows that investigated mission statements

➢ Contain **goals** that are **empirical and achievable** (and not just "vague and vapid"); this does not imply, however, that there is not a single element of rhetoric façade present.

➢ Seem to indicate that **only to some extent** HEIs position themselves in **profiling niches**; and if they do so, it is only with respect to subject fields of teaching and research ("soft profiling").

➢ Of UASs have **space for further development**, in particular with respect to research.

Summary and Conclusions

Study shows that investigated mission statements

➢ To some extent seem to react to the growing public and political concern with the societal, economic and geo-political (internationalisation) significance and role of HEIs; however, overall the mission statements do probably **not sufficiently refer to the integration of societal and institutional stakeholders** (e.g., students; employers; sponsors).

➢ Refer to "future goals" mostly in a rather general sense while **"future visions"** in a stronger sense are **largely missing.**

Summary and Conclusions

Study shows that sample HEIs are quite realistic with reference to

➤ The **limited awareness** of mission statements **among HEI members**.

➤ The practical necessity to have some elements of rhetoric façade.

➤ The **danger to overload** a mission statement with too many or too heavy expected achievements.

➤ The **high degree of similarity** of mission statements in some cases and the potential exchangeability.

Summary and Conclusions

Study shows that (selected representatives of) sample HEIs

➢ Believe that mission statements have an **important role to play**.

➢ Do not see general major deficits to their mission statements.

➢ See the need to revise the mission statement from time to time, and they are/have been currently/recently going through such revisions.
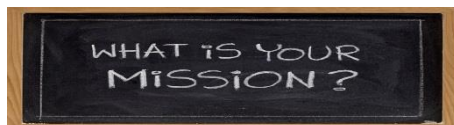
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