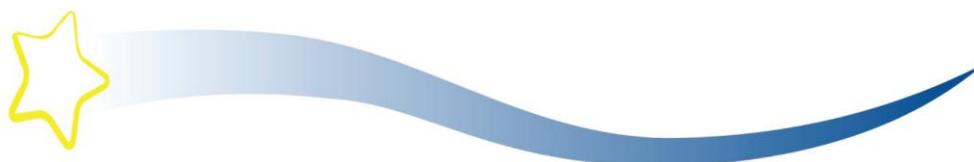


WP1 VISION AND STRATEGY

CHALLENGES UNIVERSITY AND SOCIAL VALUES

PANEL NO. 4

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CHALLENGES

Challenge: Raising awareness of and explicit assumption of values within the higher education system

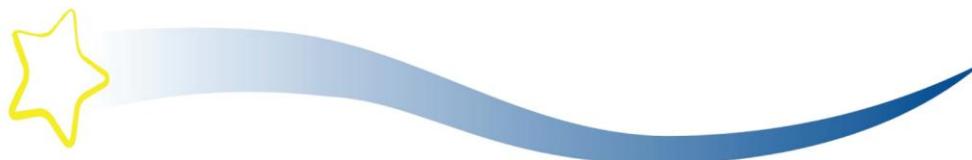
Type of challenge: absence highlighted by the diagnostic analysis

Description:

In a globalised world, the universities are increasingly seen as producers of knowledge, innovation, technology and qualified labour force from a point of view that is strictly economic, as they contribute to the creation of wealth and of a comparative advantage for the regional and national competitiveness. It is also expected from the universities to generate income because of the increasing demand in higher education stemming from all corners of the world.

However, the strictly economic point of view that leads the development and even the entire existence of the university today has become prevalent in many cases and causes a lack of balance in fulfilling the mission of the university. Not enough attention is given to the idea according to which the university does not only produce technologies and labour force, but it trains people, individuals that form an active part of the society.

The university trains individuals who are depositories of values and, seen from this perspective, it must assume in an explicit manner a set of values that would then promote in all aspects of social life, starting with the cultural context and up to the socio-economic one. Thus, the university should become involved in the up-to-date debates at local, regional, national and even global level, it should increase its involvement in extra-curricular cultural events, it should interact in a



pro-active manner with representatives of civil society, other cultural centres and institutions as well as other universities.

Challenge: Generating innovation and national intelligence

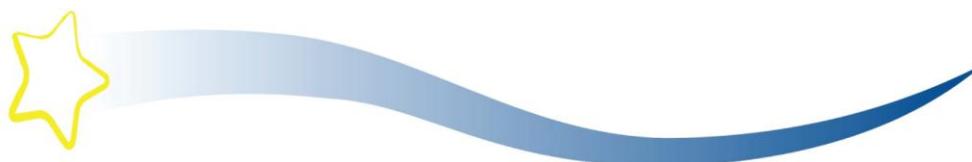
Type of challenge: opportunity

Description:

In many parts of the world, the university is seen as having an active nation-building role. Through adequate training of national human resources, the university may have a decisive impact upon the future of the state, region and even continent it is part of, on short, medium and long term.

The university is a crucial institution in generating new knowledge and in evaluating all possible alternatives. The importance of the university is relevant also in combating the concentration of power in the hands of the government administration or those of the business environment, especially if we accept the fact that the most important factor in the social and economic development and growth is the knowledge.

The university contributes to the process of building the democratic character; nevertheless the fundamental aim of the university is insuring the protection against the democratic tyranny of ideas (Fallis, 2004: 39). Controlling the creation of ideas – be it exerted by a majority or a minority – undermines democracy. However, universities can prevent, because of their autonomy, such attempts by providing a space where new and unconventional ideas are judged strictly on the basis of their intellectual quality.

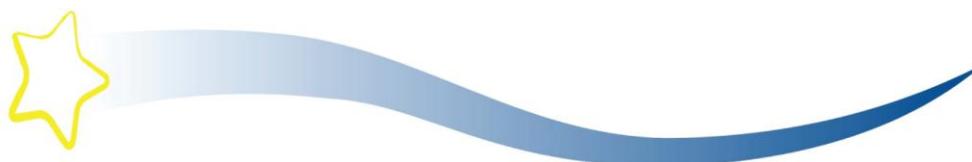


Challenge: Reducing the imbalances in the field of accessibility and social cohesion

Type of challenge: lack of balance resulting from the diagnostic analysis

Description:

The opening of the university towards more varied categories of targets, the giving up of the academic elitism and the increasing number of higher education institutions oriented towards massification have all been part of a revolution generated, on one hand, by the pressure of developing a knowledge-based economy and on the other, by the increasing tendency of higher education systems to promote social principles regarding the development of human resources. Despite having assumed the *Bologna Declaration*, which transformed the issue of accessibility and cohesion into a fundamental topic of the European Higher Education Area, the Romanian academic environment must cover the big gaps existing at the level of the structure of the student cohort between the ones coming from the rural and the urban environment or between those coming from risk categories (such as the Roma population) and the rest of the population. For instance, only 11% of the total number of the graduates of higher education were born in the rural area. Even though there is no clear statistical data regarding access to higher education in what the Roma population is concerned, it is estimated that over 80% of the population that does not follow any form of education belongs to this social category (Participation in education POS DRU). These imbalances require, without any doubt, coordinated efforts at all levels of the education system (elementary, secondary, high-school and higher education). Moreover, Romania is on the last place in the EU, with only 1.3% of the population aged between 25 and 64 taking part in a form of lifelong learning (Asachi, 2008: 4). The higher education system should re-orientate towards this part of the



population offering the possibility of insuring its competitiveness on the labour market.

Challenge: Insuring quality in the wider context of the massification of higher education

Type of challenge: Opportunity for increasing competition and differentiation among universities

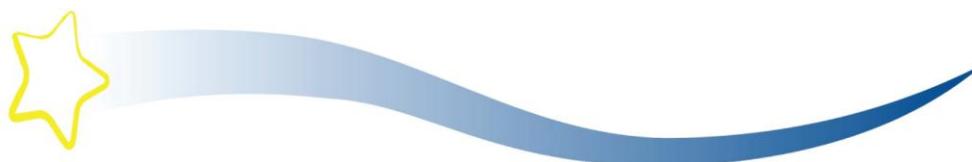
Description:

No university can insure its attractiveness and competitiveness without striving explicitly and systematically for quality.

Insuring the quality of higher education within the wider context of globalisation is a major objective for universities. In order to achieve this, quality is and should be the concern of every academic, researcher, student or non-academic staff that is active within a higher education institution.

Challenge: Increasing the competition and the differentiation among universities from the point of view of their role in the local and regional development

Type of challenge: opportunity for increasing the competition and lagging behind in what the differentiation of the universities is concerned



Description:

Universities are increasingly part of wide geographical processes, including international, national, regional and local actors. Even though the governments of national states still hold responsibilities regarding policies in education and research in the majority of the countries, the universities are continuously increasing their involvement at regional level, trying to meet regional needs. Thus, the universities must start taking into consideration a far wider variety of actors and political centres, not just the ones at the level of central administration, but - increasingly - actors from local and regional level.

Regional orientation may influence as well the specific functions of the university. These functions have undergone an accelerated change over time, influencing in their turn the mission of the university. Especially in Central and Eastern Europe, there have started to develop expectations related to the university's potential of contributing to economic and social development.

This may constitute the departure point for the differentiation of universities based on their specific roles at local, regional, national and even international level. In its turn, the differentiation may lead to an increase in the competition among universities, especially if part of the public financing would be allocated on the basis of the roles assumed and fulfilled by each university in turn.

Challenge: Stimulating the local and regional orientation of universities

Type of challenge: opportunity

Description:

One of the functions of a local- and regional-oriented university is creating its own environment, both social as well as economic, and the first step in carrying out this function consists in influencing, to a smaller or bigger degree, the changes



occurring in the environment of the university. The maximum limit would consist of influencing the total transformation of the environment according to the needs of the knowledge-based economy.

A possible definition of regional economic development is suggested by Kitagawa:

<Regional development is understood in terms of the existence, creation and strengthening of informal and formal linkages: as a “set of functioning institutions, organisations, funding structures and streams, interactive networks and forums for collaboration, for the pursuit of common economic, social and cultural goals” (Holttä, 2000, as cited in Boucher *et al.* 2003, p. 887). The contribution of universities to their region’s economic development has been studied with respect to their roles as “economic entities”; “commodified knowledge producers”, “shapers of human capital”, and “institutional actors in networks” (Boucher *et al.* 2003; Thanki, 1999; Charles and Benneworth, 2002).> (Kitagawa, 2005)

Another important concept that must be mentioned in the context of the role of the university in local and regional development is the “triple helix”. Based on the DNA model of the double helix, this model brings together in an interactive context the industry, the government authorities and the universities, the latter seen as a key factor in the knowledge based economy. (Etzkowitz și Leydesdorff, 1997).

The potential benefits brought about by the active orientation of universities towards local and regional level is illustrated in Europe by the impact of universities upon the successful development of cities such as Cambridge in England and Twente in the Netherlands. (Boucher, 2003). The impact of Cambridge University on the city of Cambridge is comparable to that of Stanford University of the MIT from the USA.



Challenge – Reducing the digital accessibility gap at the level of society

Type of challenge: opportunity

Description:

The differences in the level of digital access between the urban and rural area (see for instance statistical data www.insse.ro, as well as the situation of lagging behind in what the digital opportunities are concerned) constitute a problem to be solved, as it includes the issue of access to education as well.

Challenge: Development of online facilities and of e-learning technologies

Type of challenge: opportunity

Description:

Using electronic means for education – distance learning programmes and programmes for continuous education, that allow the student to study at their own pace and thus offer increased flexibility of the study schedule.

Developing and implementing such programmes could also enable Romanian higher education institutions to increase the number of international students enrolled in them.



Challenge: Lack of balance between managerial pressures on one hand and teaching and research pressures on the other.

Type of challenge: lack of balance resulting from the diagnostic analysis

Description:

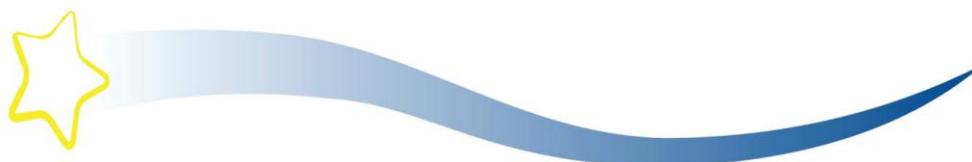
Opening the university towards the private business environment and towards a managerial approach of the decision-making process has led to the creation of a gap between the need of the managers to adapt to the socio-economic environment and the need of the academic staff to enjoy autonomy in teaching and research (D'Andrea, 2005: 19-20). This global phenomenon has left its mark upon the Romanian higher education as well, generating, in the absence of sound and coherent regulations, ambiguous relationships between the status of manager and the one of academic/researcher (Marin Vlada, 391). In many cases, this ambiguity has become the source of erosion of the academic environment, the unclear and contextual use of administrative and managerial performance standards on one hand and of teaching and research performance standards on the other, leading to a decrease in both.

Challenge: Precariousness of university autonomy with the effect of eroding the status of the university as a critical instance of the society

Type of challenge: lack of balance resulting from the diagnostic analysis

Description:

The increasing dependency on the pressures coming from the private business environment within the wider context of diminishing the financial support of the



state has lead to the erosion of university autonomy with direct consequences on the capacity of higher education institutions of maintaining their status of critical instance in the society (Barnett, 2000: 54-56). This global tendency is combined, in Romania's case, with another problem, namely the absence of legislation that is stable enough in order to insure the university's autonomy (academic, organisational, financial, functional) in its relationship with the interferences of political actors (Marga, 2005: 259-267). The Romanian higher education system is subjected thus to the conjoined pressure of both economic and political environment with distorting effects for the university's capacity of being a role model for professionalism in the public debate. This “loss of confidence” in the higher education system leads, in many situations, without any doubt, to the dramatic decrease in the level of public debate, in the quality of the solutions put forward for the problems of the society.

