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**IZZIVI GLOBALIZACIJE IN DRUŽBENO-  
EKONOMSKO OKOLJE EU**

*GLOBALISATION CHALLENGES AND THE SOCIAL-  
ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT OF THE EU*

**ZBORNİK PRISPEVKOV**

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# Comments on the Development Strategies of Schools of Higher Vocational Education in Poland

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*KEY WORDS:* schools of higher vocational education, development strategy, management of higher education institution

*ABSTRACT - Dynamic changes taking place in the internal and external environments of higher education institutions cause that preparation and implementation of development strategies is particularly important and necessary. Strategies allow to direct activities of universities towards the future and thereby move from administration to management of higher education institutions. Universities which have development strategies can be more competitive on the educational market, and can adapt to changes in the regulatory, demographic and socio-cultural areas. Management of higher education institution through the prism of strategy can contribute to improving the quality of education and research, better cooperation with other entities, awareness enhancement of the challenges facing the university, etc. The aim of the article is to analyse the development strategies of state schools of higher vocational education in Poland, in particular their missions, visions and strategic objectives. Moreover, it has been verified whether the development of the schools of higher vocational education has been linked to socio-economic development at regional and local levels in the analysed strategic documents.*

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*KLJUČNE BESEDE:* višjega strokovne šole, strategije razvoja, menedžment visokošolskih ustanov

*POVZETEK - Dinamične spremembe, ki potekajo v notranjem in zunanjem okolju visokošolskih zavodov, zahtevajo, da je priprava in izvajanje razvojnih strategij še posebej pomembna in potrebna. Strategije omogočajo usmerjanje dejavnosti univerz v prihodnost in s tem prehajanje iz administracije v menedžment visokošolskih zavodov. Univerze z razvojnimi strategijami so lahko bolj konkurenčne na izobraževalnem trgu, lažje pa se tudi prilagodijo spremembam na regulativnih, demografskih in socialno-kulturnih področjih. Menedžment visokošolske ustanove skozi prizmo strategije lahko prispeva k izboljšanju kakovosti izobraževanja in raziskav, k boljšemu sodelovanju z drugimi institucijami, k boljšemu zavedanju posameznih izzivov za univerzo itd. Cilj prispevka je analizirati razvojne strategije državnih višjih strokovnih šol na Poljskem, zlasti njihove misije, vizije in strateške cilje, hkrati pa preveriti, ali je v analiziranih strateških dokumentih razvoj višjih strokovnih šol povezan z družbeno-gospodarskim razvojem na regionalni in lokalni ravni.*

## 1 Introduction

The dynamic changes taking place in the environment of higher education institutions make formulation and implementation of development strategies particularly important, even necessary. Development strategies allow future-orientated activities, and in this way, transformation from administering to managing (Antonowicz, 2005). Universities provided with such strategies of development can compete better on free educational market and also adapt to changes taking place in regulatory, demographic and socio-cultural sphere. Managing a higher education institution through the prism of a strategy might contribute to: improvement of teaching and research

quality, stronger links with other academic centres, organising activities of particular faculties with the focus on achieving strategic objectives of college, “freeing” initiatives in terms of obtaining creditors’ funding, increasing employees’ interest in the university activities and raising awareness of the challenges facing the university (Kochalski, 2011)<sup>10</sup>.

The aim of this paper is to analyse development strategies of state schools of higher vocational education in Poland, in particular their mission, vision and strategic objectives. Moreover, it was verified whether the development of schools was connected with socio-economic development on regional and local level in analysed strategy documents. The strategies were taken from websites of particular schools or obtained by email from rectors’ offices in April and May 2016.

## 2 Size, structure and time frame of strategy documents

Strategy documents of state schools are very diversified in terms of form and the scope of presented information. The size of the documents varies from 2 to 194 pages. Usually, development strategies are not too extensive. Most documents, namely 2/3, consist of 30 pages. Reports covering from 30 to 50 pages constitute 15% of all strategies, while every fifth document has over 50 pages. The most extensive documents owe their size to the description of the school history and its activity in recent years, so the less significant element from the point of view of strategy. Among the shortest reports, there are also documents of a very general character – containing mission and development objectives as well as documents presenting in a very laconic way a wide range of issues (mission, vision, SWOT analysis, development objectives). Despite the differences presented above, the structure of most strategy documents is similar. They cover the mission, vision, development objectives ( on

<sup>10</sup> It is important to have in mind that the effect in the form of a strategic document is definitely not as important as the process of formulating the development strategy. The point is to engage in the process the whole academic community – in the form of debate or a series of debates organised in different units. The result of this is not only a good knowledge of the contents contained in particular formulations, but also “experiencing” it – emotional approach to it, knowledge of arguments for and against, and other possible options (Kozłowski, 1999). Broader considerations on the process of formulating strategies in Polish universities can be found in numerous publications (Dominiak, Leja, 2000; Jabłeczka, 2004; Mazur, 2006). Useful pointers for developing a strategy are set down in a report “Models of administration of higher schools in Poland” (2011). The obligation to develop and implement development strategies by higher schools results from Act from July 27 2005 Higher Education Act. To be precise, this obligation was laid down as a result of an amendment to the above mentioned act, which took place in 2011. The amendment also imposed a duty to elaborate strategies of the development of the basic organisational unit of a higher education institution (usually a faculty) compliant with the development strategy of the higher school. Owing to the duty imposed on universities, the question arises to what extent can higher schools elaborating their development strategies be treated as pioneers and moderators of changes in Polish higher education (in the absence of development strategies for this sector all over Poland), and to what extent can they be treated as institutions drafting strategic documents for bureaucratic reasons, only pretending pro-developmental activities (Dziedziczak - Foltyn, 2011). Several years ago J. Thieme claimed, that colleges are not able to elaborate any realistic strategic plans or they do not feel such a need (Thieme, 2009).

one or several levels). Many state schools of higher vocational education (47%) also included in their strategies the diagnosis of the current status, which as a rule was completed with SWOT analysis.

Most examined strategies were adopted in years 2011–2013, that is within two years from the introduction of an amendment to Higher Education Act which took place in 2011. In some schools the present strategy came into force before 2011, while in several after 2013. The time frame of development strategy for most state schools of higher vocational education reaches 2020, which coincides with the time frame outlined in projects of development strategies for higher education in Poland. Only in some strategies the time frame is shorter, while in two of them it goes beyond 2020. However, there are also strategies where time frame was not determined. It is worth mentioning here, that most development strategies for state schools of higher vocational education cover a period from 6 to 9 years, which is longer than the term of office of the school authorities. In some state schools of higher vocational education the strategies were developed for a shorter period of time, that is from 2 to 5 years, which leads to suppose that they largely coincide with one term of office of school authorities, while in three state schools of higher vocational education the strategies cover a longer period, that is 10–11 years.

### **3 Missions, visions and strategic objectives formulated in development strategies**

Mission was defined in development strategies in nearly all state schools of higher vocational education. During the analysis of the mission, an attempt was made to answer the following questions: Is it an integral part of the strategy? Is it a concise record? What are the main values included? Does it refer to the university stakeholders? (Sapała, 2011). From the analysis carried out it appears that the mission is an integral part of development strategy, most often stated in the beginning of the document, or after the diagnosis of the current status of the school (SWOT analysis). In most cases, the content of the mission comprises of several sentences, though, there are also many schools which formulated their mission in one sentence<sup>11</sup>. Only in few cases is the mission elaborate. The content of the mission does not always include information about the main values the state school of higher vocational education follows. If such notations are included, they mainly refer to: spreading knowledge; ensuring freedom of teaching and research; shaping individual and social identity; promoting pro-european civic and social attitudes; developing responsible democratic and patriotic behaviour; respecting local and regional traditions; promoting and maintaining academic values; educating students in accordance with ethical, social and legal norms. Sometimes the content of the mission also highlights flexibility and

<sup>11</sup> The best example is State School of Higher Vocational Education in Walbrzych, which formulated the following mission: "Satisfying the stakeholders' curiosity of the world, through developing useful skills and general cognitive and intellectual abilities."

quick reaction to market needs in the scope of education and research as well as efficiency in spending public funds. In their missions, state schools of higher vocational education usually mention the youth, students and partners from local environment (business enterprises, institutions, self-governments). Frequently, the content of the mission also mentions graduates and employees as the university stakeholders. Summing up, the conducted analysis of the missions of state schools of higher vocational education makes it possible to state that although this element is most often included in strategy documents, its extent and content indicate that the missions are usually regarded as some broad and flexible record, a collection of the school's ideas and tasks which is not fully consistent with the recommendations in this area formulated in economic sciences.

A slightly less importance is attached by state schools of higher vocational education to the vision, which was formulated by 3/4 schools. Analysing vision, an attempt was made to answer the following questions: Is it an integral part of strategy? Does it include a reference to internal transformation (improvement)? Does it refer to any model (eg. another university)? Does it refer to the position in a particular region? The results of the analysis make it possible to state that in all cases the vision appears as an integral part of strategy and is usually included in the immediate vicinity of the mission. The content of the vision usually includes a reference to internal transformation<sup>12</sup>. The vision's content quite often focuses on modernity, creativity, innovation and the school's openness to its environment and its needs. A few state schools of higher vocational education also indicate in their vision aiming to obtain the status of an academy in forthcoming years, while two of them emphasize efficiency and effectiveness of management. None of the visions mentioned that school is going to follow the example of other universities in Poland or abroad. Nearly half of them indicates that the state school of higher vocational education is going to gain a certain position and significance in a particular region. Most frequently, it is a subregion or a region, sometimes Poland, rarely Europe. In their visions, state schools of higher vocational education frequently mention strengthening their position among other state schools in Poland. Generally speaking, the analysis of the visions of the state schools of higher vocational education makes it possible to state that they are either laconic, interwoven in the text of strategy, or, on the contrary – excessively elaborate and usually focusing on the necessary activities rather than on aspirational vision of the future. Less importance is attached to this element although it is the vision that shapes the strategic objectives and actions that should be taken.

Nearly all state schools of higher vocational education set in their strategies goals of development, which, in case of being included on the highest level, were described as strategic objectives, less frequently as general, fixed, primary, directional, etc.

<sup>12</sup> This reference was presented in detail in the vision of State School of Higher Vocational Education in Kalisz. A good example is also the vision of Karkonosze College in Jelenia Góra, where it is highlighted that it should be a school of higher vocational education that guarantees a systematic increase in the quality of educational services for students and the external environment; shapes highly qualified professionals wanted at the labour market; equipped with modern didactic-laboratory facilities enabling conducting research.

goals. The number of strategic objectives ranges from 3 to 13, depending on how detailed they are, though it usually is around 5. The goals focus on two key domains of functioning of state schools of higher vocational education, namely didactics and cooperation with the community. The first of the mentioned domains was specified among strategic objectives by all schools, while the latter by 82%. A vital role is also attached to the question of administering state schools of higher vocational education (it was highlighted in strategic objectives of 68% state schools of higher vocational education), education (62%) and academic staff (59%). Among the strategic objectives there are also other domains. The most frequent are: infrastructure (50%), internationalisation (38%) and student activity (21%).

#### **4 The development of schools and socio-economic development on a regional and local level**

Apart from the general analysis of strategy documents of state schools of higher vocational education whose results were presented above, the author made an attempt to verify whether the strategies of state schools of higher vocational education, more specifically the content of mission and vision include the process of socio-economic development, particularly on a regional and local level. The results of the carried out analysis make it possible to state that formulations referring to the discussed development were included in the strategies of most, namely 72% of state schools of higher vocational education. The way of formulating them is quite diversified – from very short to relatively long. Nonetheless, the mission and/or vision emphasizes the question of serving regional development by means of didactic and research activity. Moreover, in case of several missions and/or visions, socio-economic development was connected with shaping among students, graduates, employees and local and regional community the right attitudes: democratic, civic, patriotic, pro-european etc.

#### **5 Conclusion**

Summing up the overview of the present strategy documents of state schools of higher vocational education, it is worth paying attention to one more question. In the author's opinion it should be supposed that development strategies, and in particular the content of mission and vision, to some respect reflect the system of values that are followed by school authorities. Besides, a thorough analysis of the formulations used makes it possible to draw a conclusion, perhaps too far-reaching, that sometimes there is a certain relationship between the content of the school's mission and vision and that which field of learning the rectors represent. In case of development strategies of some state schools of higher vocational education which are now run by representatives of human sciences, there is a clear reference to culture and national identity, while in strategic documents of state schools of higher vocational education

on run at present by representatives of economic, technical and medical sciences, the issue of innovation, transfer of knowledge to economy, implementation of new technologies etc. is exposed. However, it must be emphasized that the assumption above has not been verified in detail, it only results from the author's impression and observation.

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