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Mission, strategic and operational objectives

According to WUT Charter adopted in 2011, the mission of the university is that of "advanced scientific research and education, generating and transferring knowledge to society"; also, WUT aims to "create an innovative environment for research, education, artistic creation, transferring competences to the society and offering consultancy for its economic and social partners" (SER 2012, p. 3-4; for extended version see WUT charter). In the team's viewpoint, the mission of WUT is not well defined in the sense that it will lead or steer the institution, as it is too broad and generic, not giving a strong clue of what the focus is.

Also, the team observed a high number of objectives, being either "objectives", "strategic objectives" or "operational objectives", depending on the document: within the charter, the mission is accompanied by 14 objectives (10 of which are also mentioned in the SER). Within the institutional strategic plan 2012 ? 2016 (also described as the rector's "management plan", the basis on which the rector was elected), 11 strategic objectives linked to 10 strands of action like research, educational process, internationalisation, student relationship and services etc. are given. These 11 strategic objectives are accompanied by between 3 and 24 operational objectives each, which gives a total of 104 operational objectives. It should be noted that the objectives given in the charter as well as the 10 strands of action and 11 strategic objectives in the institutional management plan are listed without explicit prioritisation.

Based on the SER and the discussions during the site visits, it appears that "research" is the most important strand of action. For example, the SER mentions the strategic objective and operational objectives given for research within the institutional strategic plan, which is "the creation of a competitive research environment that would transform WUT as a pole of excellence focusing on knowledge, scientific research and artistic creation, directly impacting on teaching and on the rendered services to society". It also states that most human and financial resources of the university will be allotted for research and artistic creation in order to "meet the mission stated by the WUT, leading, eventually, to a higher ranking of the university" (SER page 4). There was no written document containing a prioritisation, but the team was told that a prioritisation was discussed and announced in the Council of Administration, which is 1) research, 2) internationalisation and 3) teaching and learning.

However, during the site visits, the team gained the impression that there wasn't solid clarity about these three prioritised areas among WUT staff and students.

Given the rector's mandate of four years as well as the present constraints, the high number of objectives has been questioned in the self-evaluation report, suggesting a smaller, feasible number of objectives to be undertaken in a qualitative manner. The team strongly supports this and recommends narrowing down and prioritising the mission and the objectives. Unless WUT decides what not to address it will be difficult to match ends and means. It should be noted, that the necessity to decrease objectives was recommended during the 2010 evaluation. With

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regards to the number of objectives and its communication within the institution, the different documents used for communicating objectives to WUT members should be made as coherent as possible in order to avoid confusion because of differences in the presentations of priorities, objectives and measures.

Another suggestion in this direction in the self-evaluation report is distributing the rector's managerial contract with the Senate among WUT staff, as it contains the main criteria that will be fulfilled by the end of the mandate (SER 2012, p. 5), which the team supports.

The importance of the relationships with external stakeholders for several reasons was emphasized by WUT both in the SER as well as during the site visits. The team observed that WUT has already established a wide network of contacts to external stakeholders and wishes to enlarge this basis. In the context of defining strategic objectives, the team recommends WUT to implement a mechanism to involve external stakeholders in order to ensure the university's future. This strongly relates to the mission statement of WUT of seeing the university deeply anchored in society.

Budget

Decreasing income in the field of teaching (both student numbers and state funding per budget place) introduced difficulties to university life. For example, the SER reports that income from study fees in 2011 has decreased by 27% compared to that of 2008. So far, WUT used its own financial reserves to cover the reduction because of changes in state funding. Furthermore, WUT tried to solve the situation with shifts in teaching loads, by ensuring full teaching loads also for academic staff members in management positions. In the team's viewpoint, this approach needs re-evaluation in the near future. Competitive higher education environment dictates that management team and academics with administrative duties should be recognised as performing one of the main activities of the university, rather than sacrificing temporarily.

Other approaches to improve the financial basis of WUT are:

- To draw in as many paying students as possible to WUT: this includes both students from Romania and abroad. As for fee-paying students from Romania, WUT also envisages fostering postgraduate study programmes in areas of high demand.
- To sign partnerships with businesses and other funding institutions: faculties the team visited try to get financial support from outside by collaborating with companies or state organisations.
- To access foreign research grants, given the mission of WUT to focus on research.

One central question for WUT management is how to engage academic staff in the acquisition of research grants as well as into research with the resources given, as the framework of academic position, teaching load and related payments seems rather limiting. Possibilities to reduce costs are seen in reducing the number of curricula and the reduction of "vacant" staff.

Regarding the budgeting process, it was explained to the team that the budget is elaborated and negotiated within the council of administration, including the budgets of the faculties. The budget is then proposed to and approved by the Senate and subject to fine-tuning by the rector.

Based on the information given in the SER as well as through additional information requested after the first visit, income and spending figures remained unclear to the team. It was impossible to get a clear picture of the relative sizes of major expenditures in order to give recommendations. In the team's view, the university should be able to present its major sources of income and expenditures in 10-15 items in an unofficial, free format, understandable to external evaluators, to discuss routine versus discretionary/strategic funding activities.

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However, there is a strong notion that the university faces financial difficulties and it is not clear if it has sufficient financial resources to achieve its many goals, given the constant battle for funds. In the team's view, the capacity for change highly depends on obtaining external funds.

To sum up, the team recommends WUT to ensure that it has an action plan with priorities, timing, responsibilities, performance indicators and an accompanying detailed and realistic financial plan which should be reviewed on an annual basis. In this respect, it should be ensured that the faculties' action plan is consistent with the WUT plan.

Management principles at WUT

Concerning management principles applied in practice at WUT, the following approaches have been emphasized by the current rector, in the SER and in the institutional strategic plan: ? Approach of participatory management, shared responsibility ? Decentralisation, giving deans more power and responsibility ? to force deans to assume their position as heads of their faculties, but with a strong managerial centre ? Clear communication structures, integrating the university between the different levels (rectorate, council of administration, faculties, senate) ? Performance-oriented management ? "Unity in diversity" (Institutional strategic plan, p. 6) ? here, in the sense of applying the same principles to all faculties of WUT, again with the baseline of being a "comprehensive university".

Clarifying responsibilities, integration of interests, institutional communication culture

With the new law and the related changes in the organisational structure, but also due to the changes in the management team in 2012, clarification of roles and responsibilities is still ongoing at WUT, as it takes time to develop new procedures. Major changes the team has been told of are: the status of the president of the Senate, chairing the sessions of the Senate and not the Senate itself; and the role of deans as part of the leadership, assuming a high responsibility for their faculty. Management structures at WUT are the university Senate representing the academic community, being the highest forum of decision and deliberation at WUT; the Council of Administration which ensures the operative management under the lead of the rector, applying strategic decisions of the university Senate; furthermore, the Faculties' councils and the Departments' councils.

The Council of Administration ? which includes the rector, all vice-rectors, the director of Administration, the head of the Doctoral Studies Council as well as the deans of all faculties and student representatives ? is both defined and, as the team could observe, also perceived as the main management body of the university (managerial centre).

The following measures are taken in order to ensure a good, integrated communication between the Council of Administration and the faculties, thus emphasising the role and responsibility of the deans, but also the approach of participatory management:

- Meetings of the Council of Administration take place at different faculties on a rotating basis. Thus, the rector intends to be more in touch with the staff and students of the respective faculty, as after the meetings there is time for a get-together open to everybody (staff, students), giving the possibility to get in direct, personal touch with the Council of Administration, gain a better ?feeling? or ?understanding? of this body.
- Within the Council of Administration, vice-rectors assume a twofold role: In addition to their field of competency and responsibility (international affairs, academic strategy etc.), every vice-rector is appointed as communication delegate of the Council of Administration to the faculty council of a certain faculty (1, 2 or 3 faculties per vice-rector). Thus, vice-rectors are to some extent a double check in communicating decisions between the Council of Administration and the faculties. The aim is to assure

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that deans stand by what has been decided and with their participation in the Council of Administration. From the rector's point of view, the reason for this change is to raise the level of responsibility for the heads of faculties and departments, to make clearer who was/is involved in which decisions and needs to carry out the activities previously supported (instead of first voting for something and afterwards speaking/acting against it). This system seems to guarantee good information flows in both directions.

- The selection procedure of the deans is based on competition: after communicating their interest to candidate for deanship at their faculty, professors need at least 50% of support from the members of the council of their faculty. It is possible for the members of the faculty council to support several candidates. Every candidate with minimum 50% support from the council presents their plan on how to develop and manage the faculty to the rectorate. Selection criteria include: managerial skills, scientific recognition, candidate's plans fitting in with the rector's strategy. Thus, the rector intends to integrate interests of the central level with the interest of the faculties as well as to raise the sense of responsibility of deans, vice-deans and faculty members. With at least 50% of support from the faculty council, the rector wants to ensure the support of the dean within the faculty. Otherwise, according to the rector, it will be hard to work if colleagues do not support their dean.

In general, it can be said that faculty members are well aware of the new management approaches, describing it as being different, more open and collegial (instead of plainly hierarchic). Also, the team observed a great amount of autonomy for the faculties and its government, which can be perceived as result of on-going decentralisation. During the site visits, the team gained the impression that mechanisms of collaboration between the different management structures and internal communication work well and find wide support by staff and students. In the team's view, decision-making at WUT is organised in a very effective way, containing healthy elements of both collegial and managerial systems. It emulates search committees and appointment systems and goes well with current trends.

Student participation in WUT governance

Student participation in governance seems to function well according to the observations and discussions the team had during the site visits. Students seem to be not only represented in all management structures and within the related commissions, but also encouraged to provide their perspective. From interviews with students, the team gained the impression that students know their representatives in the Senate and elsewhere or know at least that the Student Organisation of WUT (OSUT) has a representative in the relevant structure. From these students' perspective, there are no problems in reaching or communicating with the rector and his team as well as the deans, vice-deans and staff members.

Administration: support departments, decreasing bureaucracy, changing attitudes

In order to meet the abovementioned goals (increase in student numbers, increase of research grants), WUT has recently established new support departments at the central level to improve the services to the academic community (a department linking to schools, to attract the best school graduates to WUT; a department to support academic staff to apply for research grants at European level etc.). Faculty members the team interviewed are aware of these new structures, but mentioned that it is too early to say anything about it, as they have just recently started their activities. Also, it was reported from some faculties that they are also very active in approaching schools in order to attract students to their study programmes. It should be noted that most these new service structures are based on practice within single faculties. The team supports the university management team in its approach to make use of good practice within faculties and extend it to the university as a whole. The team would like to underline the importance of coordination between these activities and the new departments, so as to ensure that they can use their whole potential coming from synergies, but also in relation to overlapping areas (for example, department for international relations and department for accessing international research grants). This

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is also in order to assure that these departments help to diminish the reported administrative burden of academic staff, ensuring that there is less time spent on administrative issues and therefore, more time for teaching and research.

In relation to university administrative staff, the rector pointed out that professionalisation of university administrators is one of the burning issues. In order to improve the work of administrative staff, WUT organises student evaluations of administrative staff. As the team learned during the interviews with students, this exercise did have some impact on the administrative staff's attitudes towards students ? in that they are now more supportive and positive.

Human resources development

As reported in the SER, a transparent, institutional human resources policy is not yet in place. Here, the self-evaluation team points out the importance of transparent and differentiated 15 reward criteria in order not to lose young promising researchers. This is even more important as universities have the opportunity again to hire new academic staff, which has been restricted during previous years.

Material basis for mission ? teaching & learning, research and creation, sports

In relation to the infrastructure of WUT, the SER reports that steps have been taken to improve the infrastructure of the university, but they are not yet completed. Shortages are observed regarding own sports facilities, canteens and the number of places in dormitories (SER 2012, p. 14).

Students reported that library services and opening hours were fine. Still, at some faculties there were complaints about the access to databases (for example, scientific journals) relevant for their research activities being limited due to financial constraints.

The team made diverse observations regarding classrooms relevant to student-centred learning, performance and quality in teaching and learning. Even though the state of classrooms, labs and computers was reported as being satisfactory, it should be noted that in some of the buildings the furniture is quite outdated, not suited to supporting an interactive, more student-centred learning environment (for example small group rooms with movable furniture). Also, better infrastructure is definitely needed in some cases, for example in the faculty of music. The team would like to use this example to emphasise the importance of good infrastructure for non-laboratory studies ?in the case of music and performing arts there should be enough space for practice rooms with suitable acoustics, tuned instruments etc., all of which are central to the quality of teaching and learning, but easily forgotten compared to the quite obvious technical requirements of laboratory studies. The team was told that several measures in infrastructure are planned, for example a new building for the faculty of music; but also in relation to infrastructure for sports.

During the visits, the need for more dormitories was raised several times by students. Thus, the IEP team would like to underline it here, as it gained the impression that there is a link between available dorms and enrolment of new students coming from other places in Romania or abroad, who need a place to live. In the team's view, the provision of more dormitories should be a priority for WUT as well as for the city of Timisoara, as this is one of the premises for students to be able to come and study in Timisoara. In this context, it was also mentioned by the students that assistance from WUT in finding places for rent in the private sector would also be very much appreciated. According to students, an easy measure to start with could be providing a web based platform for housing. In the team's view, this form of assistance could become a concrete materialisation of some of the operational objectives in the field of student relationship and student services mentioned in the institutional strategic plan. Also, the provision of student canteens has been raised several times by students, as there are no

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student canteens at all so far. The team learned that WUT is currently establishing new canteens on the campus and welcomes these developments.

During the visits, the team observed some constraints in the accessibility to buildings for students with special needs, but also observed infrastructure that was adapted for people with reduced mobility at some of the faculties we visited. The team recommends WUT to pay attention to the accessibility of university buildings for students and staff members with reduced mobility.