

PRIMARY ELEMENTS OF THE PUBLICIZED ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BULGARIA³

The visualization of the strategic priorities of the universities in the digital space is a key task of academic management in the conditions of a dynamic educational environment and globalization. Proclaiming the official organizational culture on the Internet is essential for improving the image of educational institutions. The purpose of this study is to explore and identify the main priorities when publishing online the organizational culture of higher education institutions, with an emphasis on its primary elements and to reveal their general features, specifics and purpose. It was established that the primary element of utmost importance for universities is the mission and that the least important is the organizational vision. It is concluded that universities should more actively proclaim vision and values in addition to the mission, in order to create a complete portfolio of key elements of the organizational culture and thus build the desired image.

Keywords: higher education institutions; publicized organizational culture; mission; vision; values/principles

JEL: A23; I23

1. Introduction

Similar to any other economic/management category, organizational culture “has grown” over time, its original substance now enriched with numerous nuances added over the years by various researchers. The classic foundational definitions by E. Schein, A. Pettigrew, L. Gorman, R. Kaplan and D. Norton, etc., still relevant today, became the starting point for the research carried out by a number of scholars in this field. There are various ways to define and characterize organizational culture, as it is influenced by factors such as: the sector in which the relevant organization operates; its geographical location; the events that occurred during its history; the personalities of its employees and their patterns of interaction. Undoubtedly, organizational culture plays a key role in the functioning of the organization.

¹ Ilian Minkov, PhD, Assoc. professor at University of Economics – Varna, Industrial Business and Logistics Department, e-mail: minkov@ue-varna.bg.

² Denka Zlateva, PhD, Assoc. professor at University of Economics – Varna, Commodity Science Department, e-mail: zlateva@ue-varna.bg.

³ This paper should be cited as: Minkov, I., Zlateva, D. (2023). Primary Elements of the Publicized Organizational Culture of Higher Education Institutions in Bulgaria. – *Economic Studies (Ikonomicheski Izsledvania)*, 32(7), pp. 158-178.

This role is expressed in its support to the adopted competitive strategy under the existing conditions of the market environment

At the current stage, one of the challenges the management of universities is facing is the search for innovative approaches to their own promotion. In the conditions of heavy competition and a dynamic educational environment, the importance of the universities' intangible assets as sustainable competitive advantages is growing. One such asset is the organizational culture whose key task is to distinguish and "visualize" the relevant university in academic circles within the country and abroad, and also in its surrounding environment: among users of the educational service, public administration, financial institutions and local community. The fulfilment of this task requires making public those features of the organizational culture through which the university can be identified in the educational sphere as unique and exclusive among other higher education institutions. The organizational culture of educational institutions contributes to motivating the academic staff to apply effective, creative, productive and ethical work methods in the spirit of high responsibility, in order to provide quality educational services to interested parties. The well-crafted and publicized organizational culture of educational institutions has a positive impact on both their employees and on students and applicants.

In this regard, the *aim* of this paper is to explore and identify, through the prism of the study of the higher education sector in Bulgaria, the main priorities when publishing online the organizational culture of higher education institutions, with an emphasis on its main elements and by revealing their general features, specifics and purpose.

In order to achieve the goal thus formulated, the following research tasks have been set:

1. To study the theoretical aspects of the publicly announced organizational culture and its role in forming the organizations' identity and uniqueness in the external environment.
2. To outline the specifics of the higher education sector in Bulgaria in the context of contemporary challenges and trends.
3. To identify and examine the main elements of the publicly announced organizational culture of higher schools in Bulgaria, emphasizing the general and specific characteristics of its establishment.

The object of study is the organizational culture of all higher education institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria.

2. Literature Review

Different authors' definitions of organizational culture often differ greatly from one another: a cognitive framework consisting of attitudes, values, behavioural norms and expectations (Greenberg, Baron, 1997); collective thinking, habits, attitudes, feelings and behaviour patterns (Clemente, Greenspan, 1999); programmed way of perception derived from the beliefs and values; a behavioural pattern that was adopted by an organization as an acceptable way to solve problems (Mohelska, Sokolova, 2015); basic values, attitudes and beliefs that exist in the organisation, patterns of behaviour that express the connection between beliefs,

values and behaviours of members of the organisation (Denison, 1990). Among the many modern definitions, the approach by P. Weil is worth mentioning, who regards it as a system of relationships, actions and artefacts that stands the test of time and builds a unique common psychology among the members of a cultural society (Basenko, Zhukov, Romanov, 2012). Here, the author emphasizes the unity of cultural elements in building a unique work atmosphere in the organization, advocating the position that if an organization has a “soul”, then this soul is its organizational culture (Shemetov, Cherednikova, Petuhova, 2012).

According to Graham et al. (2022), the crafting of the organizational culture by the management team often begins with specifying and formulating a mission and some guiding values, but it can also take place without such values being explicitly stated. Ilieva (2006) adds that in the process of strategic planning, the mission requires a strategy to support it, and the culture is required to support the strategy. From these and other viewpoints, it is clear that organizational culture is considered an important tool in the “hands” of management in the process of strategic management, and its contribution to the successful implementation of the company’s strategy depends on the efforts made for its development. In view of this, the authors support Cooper’s view that culture is never neutral – it must support the strategy, and if it is not part of the solution, then it is probably part of the problem (Ilieva, 2006).

The support provided by the culture means that its elements must be in conformity with the parameters resulting from the chosen strategic line of behaviour of the organization. Thus, according to Schein (2004), cultural elements fall into three cultural layers and it follows that each of them needs to be relevant at the respective levels of strategy operationalization. The visible side of culture is contained in the uppermost layer encompassing the system of cultural artefacts. The main task of the artefacts is to provide a tangible expression of the deep-seated beliefs and values of the system, thus “visualizing” the cultural priorities of the organization to its partners in the surrounding competitive environment. A key element of this cultural layer is the official organizational culture publicized (proclaimed, disclosed) online, through which an organization (including higher education institutions) “presents itself” in its market space. Some authors add that it can be perceived as a tool/mechanism through which successful adaptation to the external environment is ensured (Basenko, Zhukov, Romanov, 2012), and also that it contributes to the improvement of the image (Makeev, 2012).

A comprehensive definition of a publicized organizational culture is given by K. Dimitrov, who regards it as “embodied in a set of company documents communicating the official culture of a target organization, perceived simultaneously as a relatively stable, but amorphous, and yet uniform aggregation of multifaceted interrelated norms, adopting a civilizational status in various forms – vision, mission, motto, creed, official philosophy/policy, company values, company history, information on the organization, code of ethics, principles, objective, corporate social responsibility, slogan or manifesto, all according to the particular needs and wants of the object of study (a company, a non-profit organization, etc.), identifying it in at least three perspectives – culture, strategy and communication” (Dimitrov, Ivanov, Geshkov, 2018).

Based on the above, we believe that the following important characteristics of an organizational culture that is publicized online can be derived:

- it reflects the official culture of the relevant organization;

- it is the result of a purposeful crafting by the management of the organization;
- it is expressed through written cultural attributes – mission, vision, motto, creed, official philosophy, history of the organization, values statement, etc.;
- it is presented in official documents of the organization, communicated in the virtual space through its official website;
- it plays an important role in identifying organizations in the market space and building up the desired image in the eyes of their partners and users, in successful adaptation to the external environment.

Undoubtedly, the role of the publicized organizational culture is growing in the conditions of a dynamic and highly competitive market environment, where an important condition for success is the crafting of unique distinctive features which the users identify with the organization. In this regard, Dimitrov et al. point out that “the modern trend of business globalization obliges senior managers acting in such an environment to purposefully and specifically (re)formulate, place and disclose a proclaimed target organizational culture” (Dimitrov, Ivanov, Geshkov, 2018). In this context, we believe that an important prerequisite for the proper creation, management and development of the publicized organizational culture is knowledge of its structural elements and their role in expressing the strategic intentions of the organization. It should be noted that the literature lacks a well-established model of such a structure – a number of specific examples show various compositions or configurations of a set of elements. Systematizing the practical experience, the literature has collected different points of view regarding this structure.

Many authors (K. Dimitrov, P. Shemetov, L. Cherednikova) agree on the leading role of the mission statement when publicizing the strategic intentions of the organization online, emphasizing its key role in the presentation of the organization. In their comprehensive study of a number of Bulgarian companies, Dimitrov et al. (2018) concluded that the mission is the most frequently used cultural element in the virtual space, the vision is less common, and the creed is hardly ever available as a corporate document. Mission statement is considered a necessary aspect from the point of view of strategic management of different types of organizations (in the private or public sector, profit or non-profit making, multinational or local) (Darbi, 2012). In this regard, according to Ozden (2011), the success of strategic planning depends largely on the proper identification and formulation of the mission statement. It also contributes to organizational identity.

Another group of researchers (Schermerhorn, 2013; Kuzmanova, Aleksandrova, 2013; Meskon, Albert, Hedouri, 1999) find that the statement of company values determining the philosophy of the organization’s functioning is as important as the mission statement. Moreover, according to some authors, values build up ideology, which in turn shapes the image of the organization (Groshev, Yuryev, 2010).

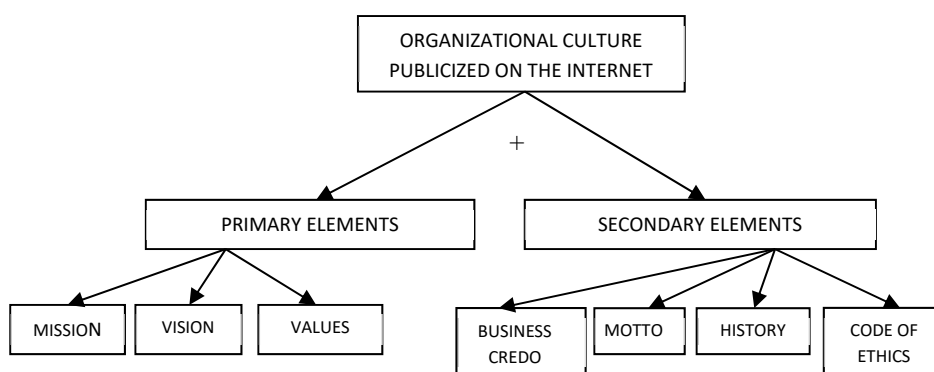
Other authors (Rothaermel, 2017) add to the above two elements the vision as an important structural element of the publicized culture. The vision identifies the future of the organization by considering the current circumstances, strengths and weaknesses, combined with opportunities for development. In business management, the vision outlines the long-term goals of the organization (Taiwo et al., 2016). Commenting on the power of the mission-

vision-values trinity in his research, MacLeod (2016) emphatically states that “successful organizations will be those that are steadfast in pursuit of their vision, unfailingly true to their mission and unwavering in adherence to their values”.

Along with these three clearly defined and strongly supported positions, there are many other points of view that focus on other elements of the publicized organizational culture: for instance, Serafimova (2007) accentuates on organizational principles, Makeev (2012) emphasizes on organizational history, etc. On the basis of these views, it can be concluded that the organizational culture publicized online is actually an amalgam of documents of lower or higher priority, whose purpose is to present information about the strategic priorities of the relevant organization in a multifaceted and appropriate manner.

The above finding is the foundation of our understanding of the matter discussed here. We believe that the organizational culture publicized online can include primary (key) and secondary (additional) documents/attributes (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Structure of organizational culture publicized on the Internet



Source: Authors' research

The organization's mission, vision and values (principles) are of primary importance, given their role in its strategic positioning.

The mission is the purpose of existence, the “global strategic ambition” (Lasserre, 2018) of the organization and its presence as an element of the official cultural attributes proclaimed online is absolutely obligatory. The primary importance of the mission stems from the fact that it is equivalent to the basic ideology of the organization, which includes, according to Sufy and Lyons (2003), the organization's basic values and goals (Dimitrov, Ivanov, Geshkov, 2018). The mission identifies each organization and its online proclamation should communicate important information related to the needs being satisfied, the target audience, the products and/or services offered, the philosophy of the organization, etc. For example, Harvard College's mission statement posted on its website reads “Our mission is to educate the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society. We do this through our commitment to the transformative power of a liberal arts and sciences education”. The mission of the University

of Cambridge is “to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence”.

The vision should go “hand in hand” with the mission, as it informs the interested parties about the global goal pursued by the organization. Its significance, as an element of strategic direction and official culture, is no less than that of the mission, as it defines the state that “the organization ultimately wants to achieve” (Rothaermel, 2017), thus laying the foundations of the goal-setting process. However, its importance (and equal standing with the mission) has only been realized in the last 20-25 years, both by the top management of organizations and by theorists in the field of strategic management. Drawing on the example already mentioned, the vision of Harvard College is “We have committed to creating and sustaining the conditions that enable all Harvard College students to experience an unparalleled educational journey that is intellectually, socially, and personally transformative”.

The University of Cambridge website states that “Our vision is to enhance our reputation as a world-class teaching and research institution which is recognized for its innovation, excellence and discovery, and attracts the best students and staff worldwide”.

Values/principles are the key priorities in an organization’s activities. As such, they complement and concretize the global strategic intentions indicated in the mission and vision statements. In this regard, an organization’s value system consists of “a statement of principles to guide an organization as it works to achieve its vision and fulfil its mission” (Rothaermel, 2017). According to Makeev (2012), values can be explicitly declared, but they can also be merely implied. Nevertheless, we believe that in order to build the desired image of the organization and communicate it successfully in the market, both the drawing up of a written code of values and its proclamation on the official website of the organization are mandatory. To illustrate the harmonious relationship between mission, vision and values within the organizational culture publicized online, we can refer here to the core values of the University of Cambridge, forming the value system of the educational institution: freedom of thought and expression; freedom from discrimination.

The online presence of these three key elements of the official organizational culture (mission, vision and values) is mandatory in order to convey a complete and clear message about the significant strategic intentions of the organization. At the same time, it can be argued that the presence on the websites of the institutions of a greater number of secondary elements, in addition to the mandatory ones, leads to a higher degree of publicization of the official culture and, accordingly, to a higher contribution to building the desired image of the organization in its external environment.

3. Methodology and Limitations of the Research

The methodology of the research is consistent with the goal and tasks of the study on which basis the specific research methods were selected. The methodology of the conducted research is based on the systematic approach, as it assesses the degree of development of the organizational culture publicized online as a system of its primary elements. The

methodological toolkit used includes the methods of analysis and synthesis, descriptive statistical analysis, content analysis and the method of comparison. The analysis has the following directions:

- Determine the number and relative share (in %) of higher education institutions that have publicized on their official websites the individual primary elements of organizational culture;
- Determine the number and relative share (in %) of higher education institutions with n ($n = 1, 2, 3$) primary elements of the publicized organizational culture;
- Outline the main characteristics of the substance of the primary elements of organizational culture.

The research was conducted on the basis of information from the official websites of the higher education institutions in Bulgaria, which are the main channel for communicating and proclaiming their official organizational culture and strategic priorities.

The limitations of the present study have been outlined as follows:

- The research was conducted in the period September – December 2022, based on a survey of only the official websites of higher education institutions in Bulgaria.
- All higher education institutions (52) appearing in the “Register of Higher Education Institutions” maintained by the National Centre for Information and Documentation in the above research period have been covered.
- The analyses, evaluations and conclusions have been made on the basis of the results of the survey of the higher education institutions that have publicized online at least one of the primary elements of their official organizational culture.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The state of higher education sector in Bulgaria in the context of modern challenges and trends

Within the system of higher education, knowledge is spread and created, human capital is formed and developed as the main factor of socio-economic development. (Kirova, Zareva, Matev, 2017). Nowadays higher education institutions around the world face challenges that affect not only their functioning but also their very identity as institutions. The development of information technologies, the transition from elitist to mass higher education and the rapidly changing and open labour market bring about changes also in the role and functions of higher education (Strategy for the Development of Higher Education, 2021). Higher education has an indisputable role in several aspects – developing new knowledge, using available knowledge to develop innovations and competitive technologies, inciting an entrepreneurial spirit, assisting companies and the administration to competently and scientifically solve the problems they face.

In recent years, the higher education system in the Republic of Bulgaria underwent significant changes under the influence of a number of external and internal factors. The traditional lecture hall-based model of higher education is increasingly competing with mass online courses offered by various platforms and organizations.

Nowadays the labour market experiences accelerating and difficult to predict dynamics. Technological changes and innovations alter the necessary competencies required for the labour market. In this regard, Stanimirov (2021) points out that the adaptation of specialists with higher education to the specifics of the working environment depends on a number of trends and factors that can be divided into two groups. Some of these are not tied to educational institutions – the worldwide processes of globalization, the rapid development of technologies, the entry into the era of the “high-tech knowledge economy”. However, other factors are entirely within the competencies of the educational institutions and can be influenced by the manner of operation of the higher schools, including the application of a traditional or an interactive approach to the educational process; analogue, digital or hybrid teaching framework; student motivation, etc. This urges the education system to adapt to global challenges and changes, on the one hand, and on the other – to ensure that students will receive the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies for successful career development (Stanimirov, 2021). Problems arise from the lack of clarity in the strategic visions of universities regarding their main functions related to education and learning, to the development of fundamental and applied research, innovation and entrepreneurial skills, as well as to their social responsibilities (National Map of Higher Education, 2021). According to Desjardins (2015), the idea that higher education performs only an educational function is utterly untenable, as higher education has an important impact on the views of citizens in any society. Educational institutions at all levels, and especially higher education institutions, have the potential to provide specific knowledge that is subsequently transformed into social skills. In the XXI century, universities make a significant contribution to shaping the future of society – a well-developed higher education system contributes to a country’s ability to compete on the global market and is crucial for economic strength and social well-being. Higher education is increasingly perceived as a tool to achieve certain socially significant ideas (Maassen, Olsen, 2007) such as democratization, social mobility, economic development and innovation.

The demographic processes of population ageing and changes in its age structure, common to European countries, have a clear manifestation in our country. According to data from the National Statistical Institute, the birth rate decreased from 10.00 (in 2010) to 8.5 (in 2021). The most serious challenge related to demographic problems that face higher education is the rapid decrease in the number of applicants and, respectively, in the number of enrolled students.

Here we must consider as a factor the high degree of competition from higher education institutions in other EU member states offering easy access, distance learning programs and free education, causing an outflow of Bulgarian applicants towards them.

Other factors contributing to the school-leavers’ interest in educational institutions abroad are the underdeveloped business environment in Bulgaria; the low remuneration of specialists with higher education in some professional fields (especially at the beginning of their careers); the excessively high concentration of businesses and public administration in the

capital city, while provincial regions remain underdeveloped and with little potential to provide the living conditions sought by young professionals, etc. (Stanimirov, 2015). These factors inevitably lead to a lowering of the criteria for admission to universities, a lowering of the requirements for students during the course of study due to mass admission, etc., which affects the quality of education.

Another serious problem faced by universities in Bulgaria is the insufficient internationalization of Bulgarian higher education. This problem consists in the insufficient international prestige of Bulgarian higher education institutions and in the lack of recognizable competitive advantages of Bulgarian higher education. According to Pinheiro et al. (2015), at the current stage there is a growing need for universities to improve the quality of education and to link their main activities (both education and scientific and applied research) more narrowly with the development of the economy and innovations in the country (nationwide and regionally). Academic education cannot be separated from scientific research, as they are in a constant co-dependence. Universities are increasingly seen as crucial actors in innovation ecosystems as they can contribute to sustainable growth and prosperity. Higher education institutions not only generate new knowledge – university professors provide consultancy and specialized expertise for ongoing research and development activities in businesses (Wolfe and Bramwell, 2008). Therefore, the concept of a modern university implies a relationship between education and research that serves the common goal of preparing highly educated and competitive professionals for the labour market (Gläser, Lange, 2007) worldwide.

The massification of higher education in the 1990s played a positive role in that it ensured democratic and broad access to higher education. At the same time, it was one of the factors that negatively affected the quality of higher education. To remedy this problem, an effective system of incentives and restrictive measures is needed to continuously improve the quality of education. To some extent, this has been achieved by introducing a higher education funding model tied to quality rather than to the number of students enrolled, as well as by an administrative reduction of the state-subsidized allotments for students in professional fields where the number of graduates significantly exceeds the demand on the labour market and makes professional realization difficult. The large number of higher education institutions also has brought about negative public attitudes, especially when seen against the background of the demographic crisis, which some time ago gave rise to the idea of a consolidation of universities. According to the authors, the implementation of this idea would rather lead to a mechanical reduction in the number of universities in the country and would inevitably result in serious upheavals in the higher education sector.

The Register of Higher Education Institutions at the National Centre for Information and Documentation currently includes 52 universities. This large number enables wide access to higher education, but, in itself, does not negatively affect the quality of education. In addition, the key role of higher education institutions in the development of the regions should be considered. It is not so much the number of universities that has a negative impact, but the fact that some of them offer education in professional fields and degree programs that are not typical for them.

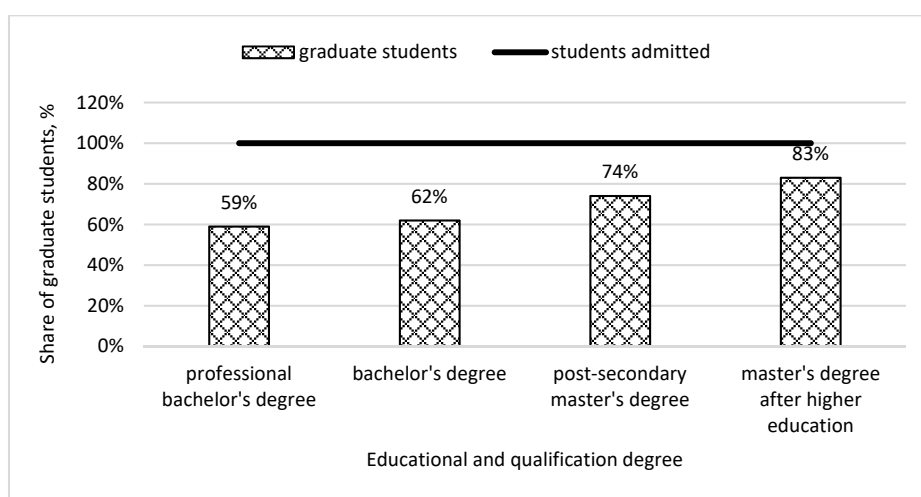
Moreover, at present, well-established traditions in the development of higher education collide with the completely different educational needs of the young generation, which causes an intellectual and technological confrontation between professors and students, leading to professional dissatisfaction of the former and disappointment with Bulgarian higher education institutions on the part of the latter. Today's universities are expected to prepare specialists with the knowledge, skills, and moral and ethical responsibility to participate fully in the new global economy (Chan, 2016), to show an active civic position and a desire for personal development (Lambert, 2014). Successful professional realization of young people now requires both academic knowledge and a rich set of skills and competences, which must be mutually integrated. According to Bates (2019), this increases the demands on those involved in teaching and learning – their own level of knowledge and skills must constantly be raised to be adequate to these demands.

The existing profile and territorial structure of higher education show imbalances of different nature and extent, including with regard to the demand and supply of educational services and the realization of graduates on the labour market by professional fields and specialities in the regulated professions, as well as by regions (National map of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria). The total capacity determined by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency for all professional fields in all higher education institutions is 407,616 students. This is almost twice the number of active students in the academic year 2021/2022 (220,439 people). On average, the number of active students in Bulgaria constitutes 54% of the total capacity determined by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency. The free and unused capacity is unevenly distributed by professional fields and specialities in the regulated professions – the smallest degree of use of the available capacity is observed in the professional field “Mathematics” (19.1%). In recent years, the serious discrepancy between the number of graduate students and the number of those enrolled four years before has been striking. In total for the country, the number of Bulgarian citizens who graduated with the academic degree “Bachelor” in the last five years constitutes 62% of the number of admitted Bulgarian students for the same degree four years before (Figure 2). The differences between the individual professional fields in this regard are also significant. Only in 7 professional fields does the share of graduates exceed 70%, while in 20 professional fields, the number of graduates is less than 50% of the number of admitted students. This is probably related to the problem facing higher education in the country highlighted by Zareva, Matev and Kirova (2014), i.e. the declining quality of primary and secondary education. International studies (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) show a continuous unfavourable trend in this regard.

In addition to the above, a range of other problems and challenges faced by the higher education sector in Bulgaria can be outlined: very large regional differences in the opportunities for attracting investment and for professional realization of students; an insufficient share of students studying in joint programs with foreign higher education institutions; cumbersome and inefficient procedures for evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions; insufficient funding of the higher education system; insufficient cooperation with employers in some higher education institutions, etc. (National Map of Higher Education, 2021). Here we should also include the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected a number of spheres of the economy and public life, including the education sector. A report examining the impact of Covid-19 on higher education around the world states that in almost all higher education institutions the normal course of the education process has

been disrupted – in some of them the studies have been suspended, and in 2/3 of the surveyed universities, in-person learning has been replaced by distance learning (Marinoni et al., 2020). As far as our country is concerned, a survey conducted among nearly 25,000 students in the period April – June 2020 (during the state of emergency) shows that 95% of university students had switched to an online form of education, over two-thirds of them were satisfied with the created prerequisites for successfully completing the academic year. Dissatisfaction with various aspects of online learning (regularity and quality of classes) is expressed by between 14 and 21% of respondents. The most significant problem related to online learning is the creation of suitable conditions for teamwork (Analyze za Rejtingovata sistema na visshite uchilishta v Bulgaria).

Figure 2. Relative share of graduate students compared to the number of students admitted four years before (in %, by degrees)



Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the National Map of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria.

All these problems require improvements to be made to the system of higher education in the country, which is directly linked to the adaptability and efforts of higher education institutions for better positioning. Stanimirov (2015) points out that in recent years processes have been identified that stimulate higher education institutions to rethink their competitive positions and encourage them to show a higher degree of flexibility and adaptability to new market realities, but now from the position of active, business-oriented entities. Therefore, globally, colleges and universities are beginning to be driven by economic goals and market-oriented values (Thompson, 2014). The differentiation of the mission, image and territorial importance of higher education institutions should be regarded as an effective means of adapting to the growing demands of the labour market. In the conditions of heavy competition on the educational market, it is of particular importance for universities to build a unique image in the eyes of all interested parties: potential and existing students, business structures, public institutions, partner organizations, etc. This necessitates the need to use the potential

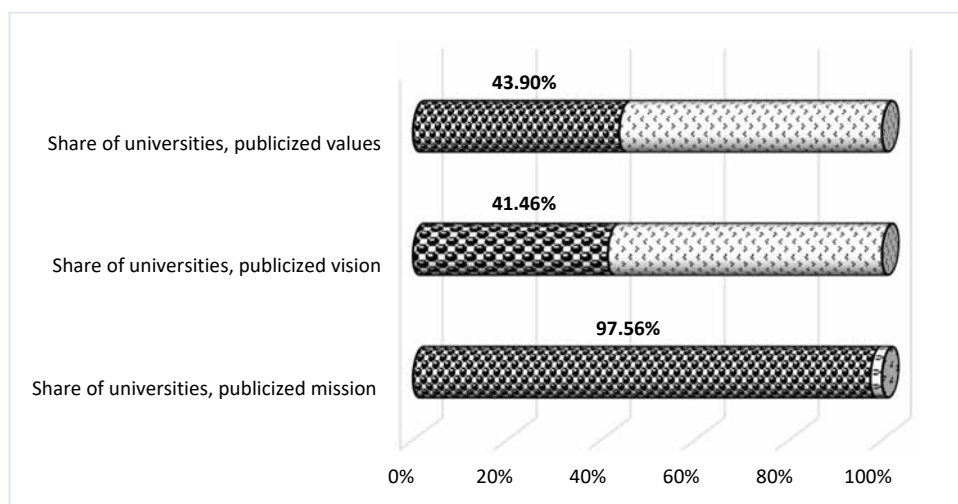
of the toolkit of the culture, “woven” into its official documents and manifestations. A great contribution in this regard is made by the elements of the organizational culture of higher education institutions publicized online, presenting their global strategic priorities.

4.2. *Analysis of the primary elements of the organizational culture of higher education institutions in Bulgaria published online*

It was found that in the case of 51 of the 52 universities studied, elements of the proclaimed organizational culture are indeed present, i.e. 98% of universities realize the importance of communicating strategic priorities online. Based on this information, it can be argued that, in general, higher education institutions in Bulgaria rely on the organizational culture proclaimed online to publicize their strategic intentions and distinguish themselves from competing universities.

The first aspect of the study concerns the determination of the relative share of higher education institutions that have publicized primary elements of their organizational culture, as well as of their distribution. It makes a positive impression that over 80% (41 universities) have publicized at least one of the primary elements of the organizational culture – either mission, vision or values/principles, which is indicative of the awareness of their strategic importance. However, it should be pointed out that this is almost entirely due to the mission statement (97.56%), and to a much lesser extent to values (43.9%) and vision (41.46%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Relative share (in %) of higher education institutions that proclaimed a mission, vision or values among all that have proclaimed primary elements of organizational culture

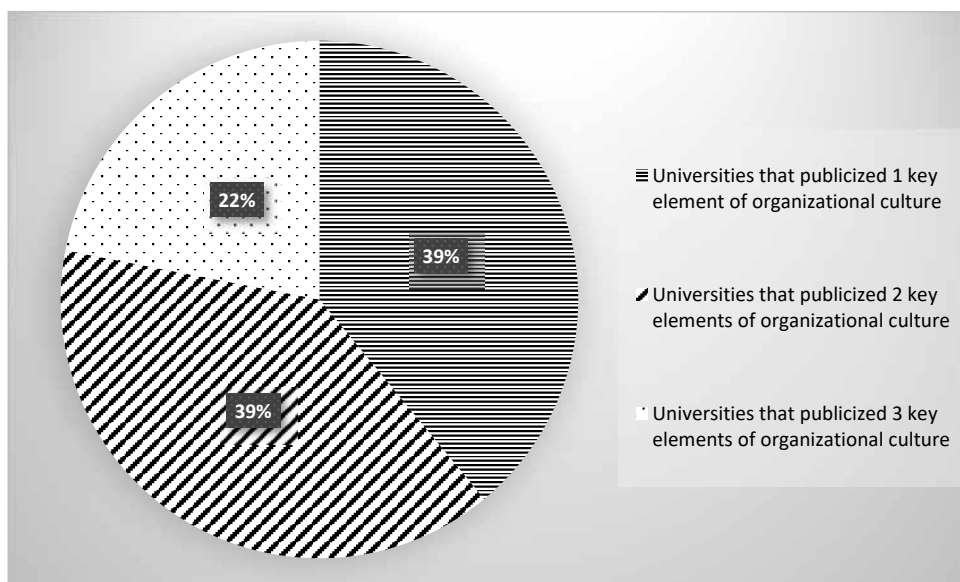


Source: Compiled by the authors based on information from the official web pages of the universities.

Only one of these 41 higher education institutions has not publicized a mission statement, while more than half have not proclaimed a global goal or institutional principles. Based on this, it can be concluded that in the context of the strategic development of educational institutions, academic governors give much more weight to the philosophy of their existence than to their place and priorities in the scientific and educational sphere. Here it should be noted that despite the awareness of the mission as an important strategic priority, some universities have not dedicated a special place for it on their official websites, and in order to find it, one must go through the Mandate Program, the Strategic Development Plan or another strategic document of the respective institution.

Regarding the degree of prevalence of the primary elements in the published organizational culture of higher education institutions, a number of conclusions can be drawn. The results show that 16 universities have proclaimed one (39.02%), another 16 – two (39.02%), and only nine universities (21.95%) – all three key elements of organizational culture (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Relative share of universities that proclaimed primary elements of organizational culture (according to the number of primary elements included)

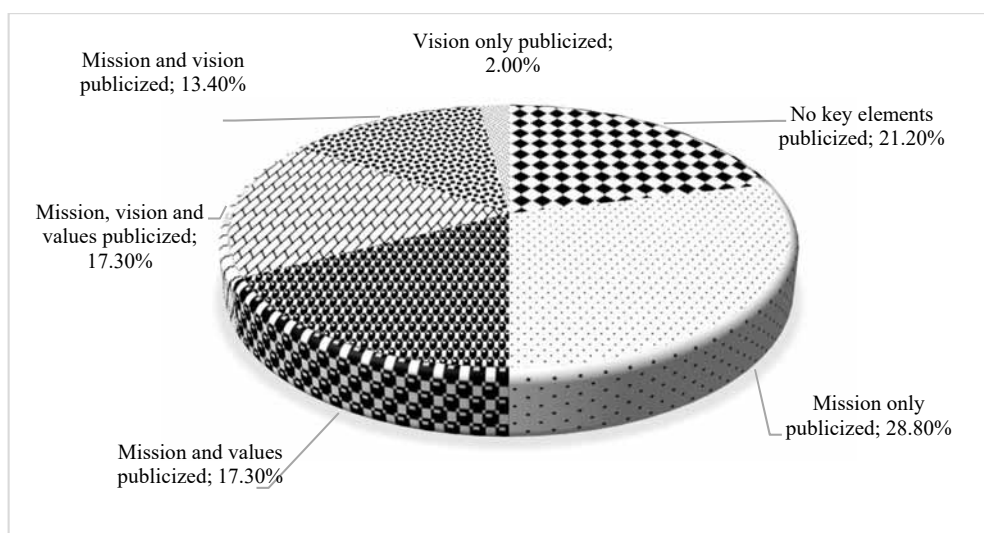


Source: Compiled by the authors based on information from the official web pages of the universities

When compared to the total number of higher education institutions where elements of the organizational culture have been identified (51), it can be seen that one primary element is present on the websites of 31.37%, two primary elements – of 31.37%, and the full set of all three elements – on the websites of only 17.65% of universities. These data confirm the conclusion of insufficient use by higher education institutions of the potential of key aspects of organizational culture to communicate their long-term policy.

Important information in terms of the communication strategy of higher education institutions and its messages is provided by identifying the preferred combinations of primary elements of the publicized organizational culture. Several preferred configuration options can be observed (Figure 5). Fifteen universities have published only a mission statement on their websites, representing 28.8% of all higher education institutions in the country and 36.59% of those that have published key elements; mission and values have been proclaimed by 9 universities (17.3% of all and 21.95% of those that have published key elements). A mission, vision and values statement is available on the websites of 9 universities, representing 17.3% of all higher education institutions and 21.95% of those that have proclaimed key elements of organizational culture.

Figure 5. Preferred combinations of primary elements of organizational culture published on university web pages



Source: Compiled by the authors based on information from the official web pages of the universities.

Mission and vision statements are available on the websites of 7 higher education institutions (13.4% of all and 17.07% of those that have publicized key elements). Kokemuller and Media (2015) point out that mission and vision are important elements of organizational culture that serve as a foundation for the strategic and tactical goals of the respective organization. Mission and vision statements are tools for communication with both internal and external stakeholders, they show the image and uniqueness of the organization (Darbi, 2012). Only a vision statement is publicized on one university's website. There are no higher education institutions in Bulgaria that have publicized only values or a combination of vision and values.

These results lead to the conclusion in configuring the core of key elements of the official culture of educational institutions publicized online, the mission is most common, regardless of whether it is published exclusively or in combination with some of the other primary

elements. This means that its role as a communication tool is fully realized by the academic governors and it is embodied purposefully in an official document. According to Bowen (2018), the mission signifies the pursuit of a goal that is unique and reveals the organization's competitive advantages and specific strengths over competitors. The most appropriate mission statements are usually general enough to drive the strategic pursuit of multiple organizational goals, yet specific enough to focus on and prioritize organizational activities and resources. Moreover, according to Esi (2013), defining, affirming and concretizing the mission of any organization involves taking into account the social and economic context in which it is crafted. Communicating the mission helps management organize the hierarchy of priorities in the short and long term.

At the same time, it can be argued that the importance of vision and values is not yet fully realized. According to Esi (2013), the vision, unlike the mission, involves both establishing values and outlining directions for the organization to follow. The vision is future-oriented and describes how a university would like to be positioned in the educational services market in 10, 15 or 20 years. It embodies the long-term ambition of how an organization would like to develop in the future relative to its competitors. In this regard, vision statements are key drivers of organizational innovation, employee engagement and motivation, performance and success in a highly competitive environment (Bowen, 2018). The lack of a clearly formulated vision prevents some universities from successfully communicating their aspirations and principles to interested parties (applicants, active students, business organizations, state and municipal administrations, etc.). The study of the essence of the primary elements of the publicized organizational culture of the universities in Bulgaria allows us to identify their characteristic features and specifics.

The analysis of institutional *mission* statements reveals that they include a wide variety of components, which, according to the authors of the present study, can be divided into 4 groups: leading, secondary, peripheral and specific.

The leading components of the mission comprise those related to the nature of the activities of the universities: training of highly qualified specialists in the relevant fields of higher education; quality of training; development of fundamental and applied research; successful professional realization of the graduates. We believe that the leading components form the basis on which the philosophy of higher education institutions is built and serve as a starting point in the goal-setting process.

Secondary in substance are those components that occur relatively often, but are of lower importance than the leading ones. These include: innovative practices in education; enterprise; social responsibility of the institution; academic traditions; active cooperation and partnership with business, etc.

Peripheral components are less often used in mission statements to demonstrate the strategic priorities of educational institutions. Among these are: making leaders; community engagement and service; patriotism; responsibility; improvement of the educational environment; autonomy; digitalization, international cooperation, work on projects, etc.

The specific components stem from the nature of the professional field in which the higher education institution conducts training. Examples of these include:

- in higher schools for military training – “participation in projects for maintaining peace and security” (Bulgarian Air Force Academy “Georgi Benkovski”), “scientific support of the transformation of the naval forces” (Naval Academy “Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov”), “defence leadership skills” (Military Academy “G. S. Rakovski”);
- in medical universities – “to participate in improving and maintaining the health of the population” (Medical University – Pleven), “to improve the health of the nation” (Medical University “Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov” – Varna);
- others – “improving the safety of society and developing the character of the built environment” (Higher Construction School “Lyuben Karavelov” – Sofia), “be a factor in the creation and development of Bulgaria’s potential to ensure its raw material and energy independence” (University of Mining and Geology “St. Ivan Rilski” – Sofia), “preservation and development of the Bulgarian artistic genius” (Academy of Music, Dance and Visual Arts “Prof. Asen Diamandiev” – Plovdiv), etc.

Based on the analysis of the missions of Bulgarian higher education institutions declared on the Internet, a number of findings and conclusions can be made. The first of these is that both modern and stereotypically formulated missions (in terms of the nature of the elements included in their composition) can be seen online. It is noteworthy that in the case of the stereotypically formulated missions (University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy – Sofia, Luben Groys Theatre College – Sofia) only the leading components are typically included, while the more modern sounding missions (e.g. of the University of Economics – Varna) focus on the modern priorities of educational institutions.

Broadly and narrowly defined missions are observed depending on the scope of the professional fields in which the respective university conducts training. Broad statements are mostly found in higher education institutions that train students in multiple professional fields (University of Veliko Tarnovo “Sts. Cyril and Methodius”, Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen), while narrowly formulated missions are declared by more narrowly specialized institutions (Technical University – Sofia, Naval Academy “Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov” – Varna).

In terms of the object on which the emphasis of the message is placed, we see both missions that are focused on the university and its stakeholders (Burgas Free University, Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”, Higher School of Insurance and Finance – Sofia, etc.), and such that are socially engaged, focused on society and its development (New Bulgarian University – Sofia, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, etc.).

In the course of the study, it was established that the mission statements of some higher schools (e.g. Agricultural University – Plovdiv, “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov” University of Burgas, “Angel Kanchev” University of Ruse, etc.) feature the vision (the global goal) as part of the mission. We believe that this is an inappropriate managerial approach, as the vision has its own place as a strategic document identifying the desired place of the higher education institution in the educational and scientific sphere.

The *visions* proclaimed on the websites of the universities in Bulgaria are also characterized by significant nuances. It is evident that the academic governors wish to position the

institutions they manage as “leading centres” or “leaders” in the educational and scientific sphere. Innovation, entrepreneurship, the quality of education and the European identity of educational institutions are most commonly indicated as the main tools for realizing these global goals. The focus of the aspirations of each of them is also of interest. In this regard, we see an aspiration to leadership in general (University of Economics – Varna, Varna University of Management, etc.), or to leadership at the national (Medical University “Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov” – Varna, Dimitar A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov), regional (University of National and World Economy – Sofia, Medical University – Sofia) or international level (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Technical University – Varna). Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that in a large part of higher education institutions, the approach to defining and publicizing long-term aspirations is correct and contributes to relevant communication with partners and building the desired institutional image. Nevertheless, it is necessary to take note of the identified weaknesses. For example, in the case of several higher schools (“Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov” University of Burgas, Higher School of Construction “Lyuben Karavelov” – Sofia, European Polytechnical University – Pernik, Military Academy “G. S. Rakovski” – Sofia, etc.), the vision exists as an official attribute of the organizational culture, but is nevertheless not proclaimed on the website itself; instead, it appears in one of the institution’s strategic documents (Mandate Program, Development Strategy, etc.). This makes the vision hard to find and practically deprives it of its communicative value.

It is also striking that some universities (University of Forestry – Sofia, University of Food Technology – Plovdiv, University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy – Sofia) have formulated the vision incorrectly, which is indicative of unawareness of its meaning and role as a global goal of the organization. This is an indication of the need to improve the strategic management skills of the relevant management teams and academic governors.

According to Cortese (2003), higher education institutions have a moral responsibility to increase the awareness, knowledge and skills of young people, to shape the values necessary for building a sustainable future. According to Wendler (2016), when formulating values and principles as elements of the organizational culture, a complex set of factors must be considered – not only internal to the organization, but also those of the environment. At present, such factors include, for example, adaptability to change; knowledge-based work; decentralization of power, etc. Felipe, Roldán and Leal-Rodríguez (2017) point out that the values and principles of organizations may emphasize flexibility, adaptability and dynamism, or the exact opposite – on stability, order and control. This element of organizational culture often focuses on integration, cooperation and unity.

The study of the publicized *values/principles* of institutions in the higher education sector in Bulgaria shows that they are a logical consequence of the declared missions and in practice concretize them, bringing to the fore the leading priorities of the institution’s policy. In this regard, the in-depth analysis allows drawing several major conclusions. The first is that it is possible to identify both universal human priorities (trust, fairness, understanding, honesty, equality, etc.) and pragmatically-oriented priorities (innovation, quality, efficiency, reliability, integrity, etc.) in the amalgam of proclaimed values. It should be noted that, from this point of view, universities can be placed into three groups: proclaiming only universal human values (European Higher School of Economics and Management – Plovdiv);

proclaiming only pragmatically-oriented values (European Polytechnical University – Pernik, University of Mining and Geology “St. Ivan Rilski” – Sofia, etc.) and proclaiming a combination of both types of values (University of Economics – Varna, Medical University “Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov” – Varna).

The analysis carried out from the point of view of the nature of the values/principles established that they are divided into universal (honesty, sustainability, creativity, partnership) and specific (moral and volitional education, maritime lifestyle, imagination, etc.). Quite naturally, universal values appear in the value systems of all educational institutions, regardless of their profile, while specific values are inherent in higher schools conducting training in specific professional fields (Naval Academy “Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov”, National Military University “Vasil Levski” – Veliko Tarnovo, Academy of Music, Dance and Visual Arts “Prof. Asen Diamandiev” – Plovdiv).

It was established that the value core of Bulgarian higher education institutions is built on the following key priorities:

- *innovation and creativity* in work;
- *high quality* of education and research;
- *socially responsible and sustainable behaviour* of professors, employees and students;
- *freedom of thought and expression*, an expression of academic freedom;
- *integrity, ethics, honesty and fairness* in behaviour and communication.

In our opinion, these values build the foundation that underlies the modern organizational culture of educational institutions in Bulgaria. At present, an increasing number of universities are focusing on adopting ethical values and ethical standards as essential components of organizational culture. The reason is that organizations must constantly show their potential “clients”, investors or partners, and also competitors, that they adhere to universally cherished moral values (Bulog and Grančić, 2017).

An essential moment in making higher schools’ official organizational culture public is also the announcement of plans for gender equality on their web pages (in connection with applications under the RP “Horizon Europe”). In this regard, A. Kirova (2022) points out that as of mid-August 2022, only 12 out of 52 higher education institutions in Bulgaria had fulfilled this criterion, which is an indicator of a low preparedness for applying under the current program targeted at research and innovation, as well as of a lack of interest in the issue of gender differences and imbalances in a considerable part of institutions.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The conducted study of the publicized organizational culture of higher education institutions in Bulgaria showed its key importance for communicating their strategic orientation and priorities to the external environment. As a result of the conducted study, the following conclusions could be made:

1. It was established that the primary element of utmost importance for universities is the mission, and that the least important is the organizational vision. At the same time, it can be argued that the lack of a formulated and publicized global goal in over 80% of universities is a sign of uncertainty as to what their desired positioning in the educational sphere might be.
2. The mission statements of higher education institutions demonstrate their philosophy of presence in the educational “market” based on novel training of qualified specialists, high quality of education, development of fundamental and applied scientific research and successful professional realization of graduates.
3. Innovation, high quality of education, socially responsible behaviour, freedom of expression and integrity in communication are key priorities in the value cores of educational institutions. They outline significant factors for the authority and successful functioning of higher schools in the educational environment.

In view of the revealed weaknesses in the public announcement of the official organizational culture, the following recommendations can be made to the academic management of higher schools:

1. To develop a more balanced portfolio of strategic priorities, in which, in addition to the mission, a vision and values/principles consistent with it should be disclosed.
2. The proclamation of the main elements of culture should be enriched with the publication of appropriate secondary elements, through which the uniqueness of higher schools in the educational environment should be emphasized.
3. To elaborate on the formulation of the mission, vision and values/principles, as the main strategic documents of higher schools, while complying with the rules of strategic management.

References

- Basenko, V., Zhukov, B., Romanov, A. (2012). *Organizatsionnoe povedenie*. Moskva: Dashkov i K.
- Bates, A. (2019). *Teaching in a Digital Age. Guidelines for Designing Teaching and Learning*, 2nd edition, Vancouver: Tony Bates Associates Ltd.
- Bowen, S. (2018). Mission and vision. The international encyclopaedia of strategic communication. – In: Heath, R. L., Johansen, W. (Editors-in-Chief), Falkheimer, J., Hallahan, K., Raupp, J. J. C., Steyn, B. (Associate Editors). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327879895_Mission_and_Vision [Accessed 20 February 2023].
- Bulog, I., Grančić, I. (2017). The Benefits of Business Ethics – Ethical Behavior of Decision Makers: the Empirical Findings from Croatia. – *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8 (4), S1, pp. 9-14.
- Chan, R. (2016). Understanding the purpose of higher education: An analysis of the economic and social benefits for completing a college degree. – *Journal of Education Policy, Planning and Administration*, 6 (5), pp. 1-40.
- Clemente, M., Greenspan, D. (1999). Culture clashes. – *Executive Excellence*, 16 (10), p. 12.
- Cortese, A. (2003). The Critical Role of Higher Education in Creating a Sustainable Future. – *Planning for Higher Education*, 31 (3), pp. 15-22.
- Darbi, W. (2012). Mission and Vision Statements and their Potential Impact on Employee Behavior and Attitudes: The case study of a public but profit oriented tertiary institution. – *International Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 3 (14), pp. 95-109.
- Denison, D. (1990). *Corporate Culture and Organizational Effectiveness*. New York: John Wiley.

- Desjardins, R. (2015). Education and Social Transformation. – *European Journal of Education*, 50 (3), pp. 239-244.
- Dimitrov, K., Ivanov, I., Geshkov, M. (2018). Proklamiranata firmena kultura vav virtualnoto prostranstvo. Sofiya: Izd. kompleks – UNSS.
- Esi, M. (2013). Performance and Excellence in Defining, Asserting and Concretizing the Mission of Business Organization. – *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 92, pp. 323-327.
- Felipe, C., Roldán, J., Leal-Rodríguez, A. (2017). Impact of Organizational Culture Values on Organizational Agility. – *Sustainability*, 9 (12), 2354, Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su9122354> [Accessed 20 February 2023].
- Gläser, J., Lange, St., Benz, A., Lütz, S., Schimank, U., Simonies, G. (eds.) (2007). *Handbuch Governance. Theoretische Grundlagen und empirische Anwendungsfelder*, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, Wiesbaden, pp. S. 437-451.
- Graham, J., Grennan, J., Harvey, C., Rajgopal S. (2022). Corporate Culture: Evidence from the Field. – *Journal of Financial Economics*, 146, pp. 552-593.
- Greenberg, J., Baron, R. (1997). *Behavior in Organizations*. Prentice-Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Groshev, I., Yuryev, V. (2010). *Menedzhment organizatsionnoy kultyury*. Moskva – Voronezh.
- Harvard College – Available at: <https://college.harvard.edu/about/mission-vision-history> [Accessed 20 February 2023].
- Ilieva, S. (2006). *Organizatsionna kultura: Sashtnost, funktsii i promyana*. Sofiya: Univ. izd. "Sv. Kliment Ohridski".
- Kirova, A. (2022). Plan za dzhendar ravenstvo v nauchnite izsledvaniya – novo iziskvane na ramkovata programa „Horizont Evropa“. – *Economic Thought Journal*, 67(5), pp. 571-594.
- Kirova, A., Zareva, I., Matev, M. (2017) *Bulgaria v obrazovatelnoto i izsledovatelското prostranstvo na Yugoiztochna Evropa*. Sofia, Institut za ikonomocheski izsledvania pri BAN. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343391162> [Accessed Mar 30 2023].
- Kokemuller, N., Media, D. (2015). Importance of Mission and Vision in organizational Strategy. *Small business, Chron.com*.
- Kuzmanova, M., Aleksandrova, M. (2013). *Menidzhment. Teoriya i praktika*. Sofiya: „Vezni-4“.
- Lambert, M. (2014). *Privatization and the public good*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Education Press.
- Lasserre, P. (2018). *Global Strategic Management*. Palgrave.
- Maassen, P., Olsen, J. (2007). *University dynamics and European integration*. Dordrecht, Springer.
- MacLeod, L. (2016). Mission, vision and values statements: the physician leader’s role. – *Physician Leadership Journal*, 3 (5), pp. 18-25.
- Makeev, V. (2012). *Korporativnaya kultura kak faktor effektivnoy deyatelnosti organizatsii*. Moskva: “Librokom“.
- Marinoni, G., Land, H., Jensen, T. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 on higher education around the world. IAU Global Survey Report. International Association of Universities.
- Meskon, M., Alybert, M., Hedouri, F. (1999). *Osnovy menedzhmenta*. Moskva: Izd. „Delo“.
- Mnenieto na studentite za onlayn obuchenieto v usloviyata na covid-19 prez proletta na 2020 g. Analiz za Reytingovata sistema na visshite uchilishta v Bulgaria – Available at: <https://rsvu.mon.bg/rsvu4/#/media-article/113> [Accessed March 2023].
- Mohelska, H. and Sokolova, M. (2015). Organisational culture and leadership – joint vessels?. – *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 171, pp. 1011-1016.
- National Statistical Institute – Available at: <https://nsi.bg> [Accessed February 2023]
- Natsionalna karta na vissheto obrazovanie v Republika Bulgaria – Available at: file:///d:/Downloads/21RH538-pril3_160921-2.pdf [Accessed 20 February 2023].
- Ozdem, G. (2011). An analysis of the mission and vision statements on the strategic plans of higher education institutions. – *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 11 (4), pp. 1887-1894.
- Pinheiro, R. et al. (2015). *The Role of Higher Education in Society and the Changing Institutionalized Features in Higher Education*. The Palgrave International Handbook of Higher Education Policy and Governance. Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 225-242.
- Rothaermel, F. (2017). *Strategic Management*. NY: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Salus University – <https://www.salus.edu/About/Strategic-Planning/Mission,-Vision,-and-Credo.aspx>
- Schein, E. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership*. JOSSEY – BASS. 3rd edition.
- Schermerhorn, J. (2013). *Introduction to management*. Willey.
- Serafimova, D. (2007). *Osnovi na upravlenieto*. Varna: Steno.
- Shemetov, P., Cherednikova, L., Petuhova, S. (2012). *Menedzhment*. Moskva: Omega-L.
- Stanimirov, E. (2015). Aktualni aktsenti pri priema i obuchenieto na studenti v Ikonomicheski universitet – Varna. *Izvestiya na IU – Varna*, vol. 2, pp. 9-27.

Minkov, I., Zlateva, D. (2023). Primary Elements of the Publicized Organizational Culture of Higher Education Institutions in Bulgaria.

- Stanimirov, E. (2021). Transformatsiyata na obrazovatelната sistema – faktor za uspehna kariera. Upravlenie na choveshkite resursi. Sbornik s dokladi ot Mezhdunaradna nauchno-prakticheska konferentsiya, IU-Varna, pp. 13-24.
- Strategiyata za razvite na vissheto obrazovanie v Republika Bulgaria za perioda 2021-2030, DV. 2/08.01.2021.
- Sufi, T. and Lyons, H. (2003). Mission statements exposed. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 15 (5), pp. 255-262.
- Taiwo, A., Lawal, F., Agwu, M. (2016). Vision and Mission in Organization: Myth or Heuristic Device?. – *The International Journal of Business & Management*, 4 (3), pp. 127-134.
- Thompson, R. (2014). *Beyond reason and tolerance: The purpose and practice of higher education*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- University of Cambridge – Available at: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/about-the-university/how-the-university-and-colleges-work/the-universitys-mission-and-core-values> [Accessed 20 February 2023]
- Wendler, R. (2016). Dimensions of Organizational Agility in the Software and IT Service Industry – Insights from an Empirical Investigation. – *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 39 (1), pp. 439-482.
- Wolfe, D., Bramwell, A. (2008). Universities and regional economic development: The entrepreneurial University of Waterloo. – *Research Policy*, 37 (8), pp. 1175-1187.
- Zareva, I., Matev, M., Kirova, A. (2014). *Vissheto obrazovanie i naukata v Bulgaria. Ikonomicheski, sotsialni i dzhendar izmerenia*. Institut za ikonomocheski izsledvania pri BAN. Sofia: Academicno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov".