

# THE CONTENT OF MISSION STATEMENTS OF SLOVENIAN HE INSTITUTIONS

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## **Abstract:**

The empirical research was applied to gain insight into the content of the written statements of mission statements of HE institutions (faculties, art academies and colleges) that were entered into the register of MIZŠ (Slovenian Ministry of HE) in March 2016. Websites of all HE institutions were inspected. The most frequent words found in mission statements of Slovenian HE institutions are "subject area", "development", "education", "knowledge" and "research". Beside the use of descriptive analytic methods, we established and analyzed the network of keywords in mission statements of Slovenian HE institutions. Some advanced network analytic methods as the notion of island were applied. By analyzing the content of the mission statements of HE institutions in Slovenia, we have identified their key elements. As critical dimensions we recognize "the purpose and activities", "future orientation", "respect for diversity", "civic values" and "rights and obligations".

*Keywords: mission statements, higher education, network analysis, network islands*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of higher education institutions (HEIs) is the implementation of educational activities, research and artistic activities awarding academic degrees or professional certification. Higher education is increasingly important for individuals and society. By creating and delivering knowledge, higher education impacts on personal and professional development of individuals, prepare them for the labour market and for active citizenship. Through the application of knowledge in new industrial processes and services, it enables the development and progress of society.

Since the legislation has allowed the establishment of private higher education institutions, the number of HEIs in Slovenia, has risen from 62 to 102 in the last decade. On the other hand, the number of students has dropped from 100,113 to 69,636. Increasing the number of institutions and declining the number of students, represents increasing competition for providers of higher education and increasing variety of appropriate educational program for prospective students. In this situation, it is important for HEIs to communicate their own identity, features, services and their aims. This basic information is reported through the form of brief generalized mission statement.

The mission statement contributes to a coherent, complementary and cost-effective system, to ensuring the sustainability and high quality of service (Mangeol, 2014). Kosmützky & Krücken (2015) analysed mission statements of the German universities and has demonstrated that universities through mission statements create their market position. By emphasizing their organizational peculiarities and unique images, they try to distinguish themselves from other universities, identified as their competitors. Palmer & Short (2008) have detected a connection between the content of the mission statement and the performance of institutions. Ganu (2013) has demonstrated that the mission affects the behaviour of employees in the workplace, is the bond between employees and institutions and serves as a set of values among the members of the organization. By itself, it does not affect the job satisfaction and employee motivation.

The mission statements of HEIs in 21st century have based on three different missions: education, research and public service. The third mission means the transmission of higher knowledge to the private sector and wider society through external service activities: applied researches, analysis for rural and urban communities, service learning (Scott, 2006), public-private cooperation and "entrepreneurial HEIs", technology transfer offices, "incubator" and "spin-off" firms, science and technology parks (OECD, 2011). Some institutions add to these basic activities their own educational, social, political, or spiritual aims (Scott, 2006). Mission statements of HEIs, according to Fenske (as cited in Scott, 2006), often express the aspirations, that society has for HEIs, and according to Mecham & Barrett (as cited in Wilson, Meyer & McNeal, 2012), represent a consensus of common values, expectations regarding student learning and development and priorities for several years in ahead. The missions of modern HEIs are more complex than just the creation and transmission of knowledge. Missions of American HEIs includes »the generation of jobs, a mainstay of the local economy, a source of class maintenance, a place of cultural transmission, and a vehicle for class transcendence (Lowman, 2010, p. 238).

Missions of non-profit HEIs include broad social purpose combined with teaching, research and public service, while missions of for-profit HEIs usually include a narrower range of activities and are mainly focused on the market of students, giving them a profit and ensure their survival (Fugazzotto, 2009).

Empirical analysis of the HEIs mission statements have demonstrated that their content mainly reflects the traditional topics such as research, teaching, liberal arts, services (Wilson, Meyer & McNeal, 2012; Ganu, 2013; Morphew & Hartley, 2006) and the foundations of their culture (Ganu, 2011; Firmin & Merrick Gilson, 2010; Holosko, Winkel, Crandall & Briggs, 2015). They also found the mention of scholarship and citizenship development, commitment to excellence, intellectual growth (Wilson et. al., 2012), some core competencies (Holosko et. al., 2015).

## 2. DATA ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

The empirical research was applied to gain insight into the content of the written statements of mission statements of HE institutions (faculties, art academies and colleges) that were entered into the register of MIZŠ (Slovenian Ministry of HE) in March 2016. Records of mission statements were collected through their websites. Obtained dataset includes all records that in the title include the word "mission" and are accessible directly on the website or in a document available on the website.

Websites of all higher education institutions (universities, academies and colleges) were inspected with the exception of universities. Mission statement on the website were observed in 22 (84.6%) members of the University of Ljubljana, in all (17) members of the University of Maribor and the University of Primorska (6), 5 (71.3%) members of the University of Nova Gorica and in 43 (93.5%) independent

higher education institutions. The study therefore included 93 institutions of HE, which is 91.2%, excluding the universities, which are, according to the Higher Education Act (HEA-NPB10 2013, Art. 2) defined as independent higher education institutions. These data are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The number of higher education institutions in Slovenia enrolled in the register in MIZŠ

	Frequency
University of Ljubljana	26
University of Maribor	17
University of Primorska	6
University of Nova Gorica	7
Other higher education institutions	50
Total	106

Source: MIZŠ, 2016 a

Among the 93 institutions that were included in the study, 46 (49.5%) are public and 47 (50.5%) are private HE institutions. Given the number of students enrolled in HE institutions there are significant differences between them. On October 30th 2015, according to data from the MIZŠ (2016 b), one quarter HE institutions have enrolled from 0 to 78 students, a quarter of 87 to 392.5 students, a quarter from 406 to 947 students and a quarter from 952 to 5117 students. Given the number of students enrolled in the Academy of Dance we do not have data.

The mission of HE institutions on the following website enshrined in the declarations, which are not mutually differ only in terms of content and structure, but also in scope. Some HE institutions recorded its mission, more generally, in just one sentence, but some more detail the extent to half a page or more. Declarations of missions written in the form above examples, due to its textual form, do not provide quantitative analysis of keywords, which is defined as searching for the most common. It was therefore necessary that written mission statements have adequate arrangements for the quantitative analysis. We applied the following procedure. Each record of the mission statement was specially exported to a text editor TextPad, where we remove all accented characters. For further preparation and analysis of text and counting keywords a statistical program R (R Core Team, 2017) was used. The material was prepared in such a way that we have received all uppercase letters into a small captions, removed all the punctuation, numbers and redundant space, i.e. double spaces or lines.

In mission statements 2629 different words were found. Some words do not have a substantive interest, for example: "like", "both", "the", "and," "the," "a," "in," "all" "other," "other," "you," "where," "to "," your ", etc. and synonyms like. "Studies", "studios", "Study", "studio", "studio", "studio", "studio", "studio", "studio", "studios", "studio", to name a few. Since the software itself does not recognize redundant words and synonyms we manually removed all superfluous words and account all synonyms. It was done with caution that we cover all the possible variations of each word. We found 227 redundant words and 1529 synonym sets. Thus, we get a list of words in the written statements of the missions of HE institutions, which included 873 units. A list of words and their appearance in mission statements of HE institutions were the basis for the construction of the network.

### 3. RESULTS

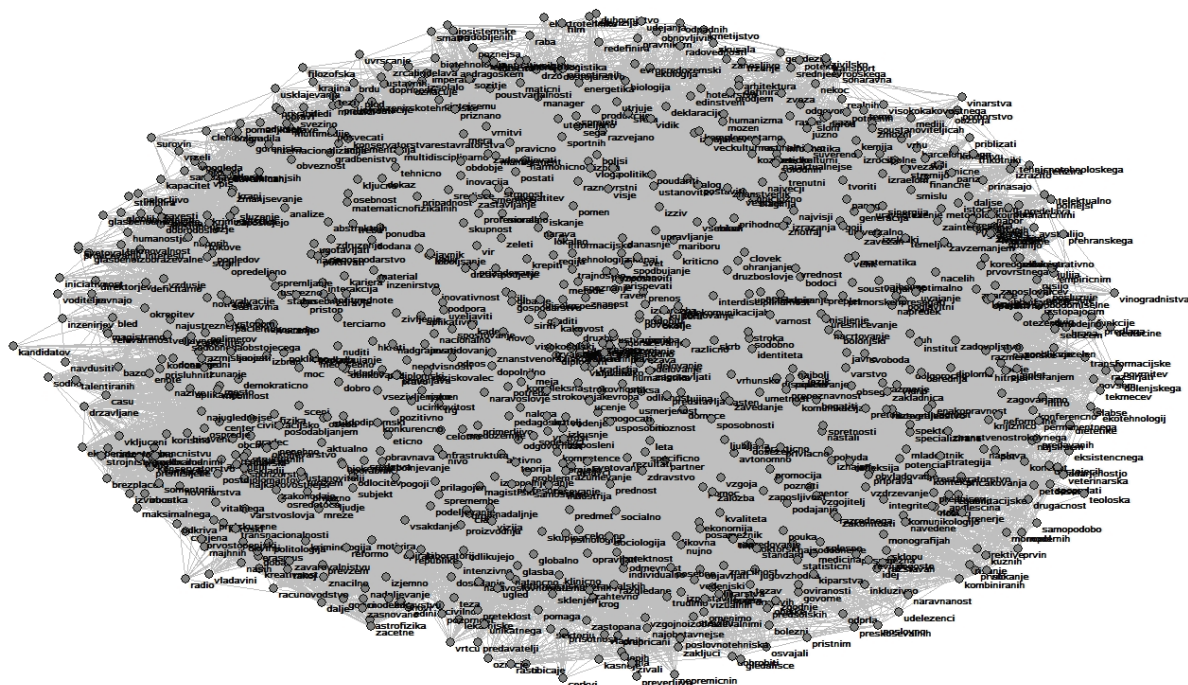
Table 2 shows the frequency of keywords, namely those words in mission statements that occur more than 20 times. The most frequent word in mission statements, it occur 127 times, was the word "subject area", followed by the word "development" with a frequency of 123, 121-times appears the word "education" 111 times "knowledge", followed by "research" (116 times). "subject area", "development", "education", "knowledge" and "research" are words which may be based on their frequency suggests that in some mission statements occur more than once, while the other words were not mentioned by all HE institutions.

**Table 2:** Keywords in mission statements of Slovenian HE institutions

	Keywords	Frequency	Keywords	Frequency	Keywords	Frequency
1.	subject area	127	17. Slovene	43	33. teacher	27
2.	development	123	18. science	42	34. practice	27
3.	education	121	19. economy	42	35. business	27
4.	knowledge	111	20. HE	40	36. staff	26
5.	research	106	21. connection	37	37. health care	24
6.	Studying	78	22. activity	37	38. expert	24
7.	Student	75	23. pedagogic	36	39. to enable	24
8.	Work	74	24. high	34	40. art	23
9.	society	58	25. to spread	34	41. law	23
10.	quality	57	26. to train	32	42. operation	23
11.	environment	56	27. need	32	43. success	22
12.	international	55	28. transmission	31	44. different	22
13.	implementation	53	29. new	31	45. Europe	22
14.	to ensure	49	30. cooperation	28	46. region	21
15.	creation	49	31. to contribute	28	47. to acquire	21
16.	expertise	48	32. graduate	28	48. excellence	21

We established the network of keywords in mission statements of Slovenian HE institutions in the following way. Keywords itself are so-called actors of the network represented by nodes. Relation between keywords, represented by a link, is defined with the number of times adjacent words appeared in the same mission statement. The resulting network is displayed in Figure 1. It seems to be medium-sized undirected and weighted network with a large number of links among nodes. The network consists of one large component. However, the network is very dense and therefore we opted another solution.

Figure 1: Graphical representation of the initial keywords network



In the underlying network, we removed those links that have a value of 1 and obtained a network with less ties. A unique combination of two words, which represents the value of the link 1, it may be coincidental. We also deleted all loops. Loop in this network means that the word is associated only with itself. For us this is of no importance because we are interested in the relations among different words.

Table 4 shows network properties after removing links with value of 1. It is composed of 471 keywords and 14,997 links among them. Each link has a value higher than the number one, the highest value on the link is 53. This corresponds to the fact that (at least) two words sharing the highest link are in 53 common mission statements. These two words are: education and development. Each word in the obtained network is linked with other words at least 2 times and not more than 429 times. On average each word connects with 63.68 words. Network density is approximately 0.14, meaning that there are almost 14% of all possible links among keywords in our network. We can note that created network consists of 402 fewer nodes and 49,543 fewer connections compared to initial network.

**Table 4:** Properties of the network of keywords with deleted links of value 1

Number of nodes	471
Number of links	14.997
Density	0,1354
Average degree	63,6815
Lowest degree	2
Highest degree	429
Lowest weight	2
Highest weight	53

Due to the diverse weights on links between keywords, we normalized links. For normalization, we used a so-called Cosine diversity (Schneider & Borlund, 2007), which has a value between 0 and 1.

The concept of island in the network represent groups of nodes in the network that are more closely connected than nodes outside the island (Batagelj et al., 2014). In our case, the size of islands were restricted between 4 and 9 nodes per island. At the end we are left with 29 islands with all-together 186 nodes, which is shown in Figure 2. The islands are separated by color, the size of each node in Figure 2 is proportional to its level, i.e. large nodes represent words that are linked with multiple words.

Lowest degree is 2 and it belongs to nine words. The maximum degree is 429 and belongs to only one word, that is, "education". More often linked words are: "development", "scope", "student", "knowledge" and "explore" (Table 5). These keywords also vapors links with the highest weights. They are not only the most central in terms of their level of integration, but also in terms of centrality measures closeness and betweenness which are calculated in Table 5. Therefore, they are closest to the rest of the text and located on many of the shortest connections between other pairs of words.

**Table 5:** Keywords with highest degrees, closenes and betweennes

Rang	Keywords	Degree	Closenes	Betweennes
1	education	429	0,9198	0,1056
2	development	402	0,8736	0,0667
3	study area	389	0,8530	0,0687
4	student	373	0,8289	0,0496
5	knowledge	367	0,8202	0,0470
6	research	336	0,7781	0,0385
7	studying	335	0,7769	0,0343
8	work	327	0,7667	0,0306
9	quality	314	0,7508	0,0251
10	international	289	0,7220	0,0226

Figure 2: Network with Islands



The islands represent different substantive dimensions of mission statements of HE institutions and are displayed in Figure 2. Among them we found the most important referring to: "the purpose and activities", "future orientation", "respect for diversity", "civic values" and "rights and obligations". In Figure 2 the island "the purpose and activities" contains red colored nodes, island "future orientation" dark green nodes, island "diversity" yellow colored nodes, island "civic values" blue nodes and two islands of "rights and duties" are colored by the white and black color. Among other islands, some of them are containing a variety of common elements, which are more difficult to explain in a meaningful content. On the other hand, some other islands are specifically targeted, for example into science, into education etc.

Island "purpose and activities" consisting of words in the mission statements that are most frequently connected to each other. These are the keywords: "education", "exploration", "development", "knowledge" and "scope". The word "education" is associated with the word "society", "knowledge" and the "transfer" and "development" of "work." Orientation in the future is expressed through "long-term", which is a key word in terms of integration with other words and links with the "vision", "identity", "care" and "positivity" over the latter as well as the "enrichment". Respect for the diversity of the term "multiculturalism" as a keyword for this island, which is connected with the "intercultural", "dialogue," "humanities", "respect", and indirectly with "management". Island "civic values" through "service" as the central node of the island, connecting the "country" and "member" with "values and" democratic ". Elements of "rights and duties" were seen on two islands. One of the islands over the word "face" linking "prosperity", "freedom" and "active" while others have "tolerance", "expression" and "equality" and "propriety" to be associated with "thinking."

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

By analyzing the content of the mission statements of HE institutions in Slovenia, we have identified their key elements. Such as the most common single words, statements and dimensions, as content-related elements. As critical dimensions we recognize "the purpose and activities", "future orientation", "respect for diversity", "civic values" and "rights and obligations". Keywords in the context of our research reflect the traditional themes missions of HE institutions, like those of the public US institutions (Wilson, Meyer and McNeal, 2012) and to the mission of HE institutions in Ghana (Ganu, 2013). We found also certain differences. Namely, in the mission statements of HE institutions in the field of social work (Holosko et al., 2015) and HE in Wales (James and Huisman, 2009), the term "explore" was rarely mentioned.

For the processing and presentation of the information obtained was used for statistical programs MS Excel, R, and Spider, which is intended for the analysis and visualization of large networks (Batagelj and Mrvar, 2017).

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