

Allegato d)

## **Proposta di linee generali per il piano strategico di Ateneo**

Art. 5 co. 5 dello Statuto dell'Università degli Studi di Trento

### Executive summary

Flavio Deflorian

#### First part: general framework, values and perspectives

Every University is an institution, but it is also a community of people, and its activity is not simply the sum of teaching, research and knowledge transfer, but is the synergic combination of these three elements.

#### **The University of Trento as an integrated system: method and values**

The University is no longer an isolated institution, but increasingly the hub of a system on international scale. It is also a complex system, organised in departments, which are the heart of the university itself and contribute, through their autonomy, to the democratic management of the institution.

The sense of identity and belonging, which is a distinctive feature of our community, and which encompasses both its student, teaching and administrative members, is fundamental and should be strengthened. Furthermore, a community is strong and united when it is inclusive and supports disadvantaged people. Significant efforts have been made in recent years to improve inclusiveness in the field of disability, gender equity and equal opportunities, which are now indispensable elements in our university's strategy, and which I fully share.

The University is an educational institution, not only from a professional point of view, but also contributing to the development responsible citizens. The ethical issues, expressed in our Codice Etico are particularly relevant in research. Democratic and participatory management of the university is possible in a context of transparency of information, participation in decisions, within the limits established by regulations, and in a framework of public and free discussion, which must be encouraged. Finally, I would like to underline a further value, generally important, but even more relevant for the new generations of students: environmental sustainability.

Together with the other values (inclusiveness, respect, transparency, participation), it is necessary to have a method of evaluating the degree of achievement of the shared objectives.

## **The context**

Over the years, the University of Trento has grown over the years, thanks to the work of many people, as an internationally recognized training and research institution. Recently, this effort enhanced the reputation and external recognition, as shown in the high international rankings, in the evaluations of the ANVUR and in the list of “Dipartimenti di eccellenza”.

The academic community of the University of Trento, formed by students, technical and administrative staff, faculty members and researchers, is a community of about 20,000 people, aware and proud of their role and responsible towards society.

The University of Trento is an active component of the international, European and non-European network of higher education and research. In the local context in which it operates, there are other important research institutions operating in the area, in particular the Edmund Mach Foundation (FEM), the Bruno Kessler Foundation (FBK) and the Foundation Hun Innovazione Trentino Innovation Hub (HII). Another very important aspect is the cooperation with other Universities. Several university courses are in common with other Universities (most recently the degree course in Medicine with Verona), sometimes also with foreign Universities.

The history of the University of Trento is strongly connected to local institutions, in particular the Autonomous Province of Trento (PAT). This fact cannot be ignored or forgotten, neither by the University, nor by the local political power, which has the moral and political, as well as legal, obligation to look to the University of Trento as an autonomous and primary partner in the academic affairs in Trentino

On the other hand, the University of Trento has an obligation to keep a dialogue and seek shared solutions with the local government, the legitimate democratic representative body of the people of Trentino. The dialogue between the two institutions must always fully respect the roles and specific autonomy.

## **Long-term prospects and challenges.**

As a result of the previous University managements, we have a growing university, with increasing numbers of students, professors and in the programmes offered and research quality, economically sound, with a strong sense of identity of the academic community, at the top of national and international rankings. In any future prospect and commitment, this important heritage must not be wasted. Several challenges lie ahead of us in the coming years. The first concerns the starting School of Medicine, a project which is not a simple extension, and which must enhance and act as a driving force for the existing activities.

The challenge is to allow the development of new initiatives without compromising the growth of what is already consolidated and without closing the doors to other additional projects.

Another major issue for the next years is related to infrastructure. We need new room, the topic is urgent in the scientific departments (“di collina”), but it is also pressing the social and humanities ones (“in città”) and those in Rovereto. Specifically, in addition to primary university needs (classrooms, studios, laboratories), we must consider needs such as room for visiting teachers/researchers, and for start-ups and other entrepreneurial initiatives related to the University, also taking into account the future changes in working methods.

It will be necessary, together with the Opera Universitaria, to plan and share the infrastructural choices necessary to ensure a high quality students’ life. Infrastructure does not just mean buildings: we will need an extraordinary effort in the next years to renew our service infrastructures as well, application and management technology (software) services.

These elements point to a further challenge for the future: economic and financial sustainability. Over the next six years, it will be increasingly necessary to consider the University as an integrated unit of Trento and Rovereto. Moreover, it will also be important to involve the suburbs, the valleys of Trentino, so that our University is increasingly perceived as a shared asset of all the inhabitants of this territory.

## Second part: specific issues

### **The University: people’s view**

#### Students

Students have always played an active role in university life in Trento, effectively contributing to the growth of the university with an overall improvement in relations between the students and the academy. The responsible and constructive contribution that the student community has provided in the governance of the University must be recognized.

We often tend to underestimate that a good university, as we want to be, is necessarily a university with an active student community, with critical participation, as individuals and as organized entities. The task of the University is to try to foster all students. A further effort must be made to attract the best talents, but also to allow all students to grow, whatever their starting point. Nobody should be left behind, and when I say this, I am thinking to actions to reduce the phenomena of abandonment and delay in studies. A fundamental task, in fostering a positive university experience, is promoting an informed choice of study through activities of University study orientation.

A future challenge concerns our master's degree courses. The attractiveness of our master's degrees (many in English) must be increased and supported through targeted orientation actions adapted to specific training areas. Particular attention must be paid to professional degrees, in close collaboration with organizations and professional orders.

Last but not least there are PhD students. We need to expand, as far as possible in the current context, the attractiveness of our doctoral programmes for foreign students coming from the European Union. Furthermore, the large community of foreign doctoral students must be accompanied in the integration into the local university and social environment, by strengthening and enhancing the role of the Consulta dei dottorandi e assegnisti.

The University of Trento is known and appreciated for its international mobility programmes, and for the complementary activities, which are an integral part of the life of students. These recreational, cultural and social activities include in particular sports, where the university is also involved in the dual career path of professional sport student.

Finally, I believe that in the coming years the student community will change and diversify its nature: the increase in life-long learning activities will involve students from the University of Trento of a much more varied age than the current one.

Furthermore, while there is a clear preference for teaching involving physical interaction, in the next future technologies will also be useful, especially to facilitate teaching activities under stress conditions, such as problems of temporary or permanent student mobility limits.

#### Teaching and research staff

The permanent (or tenure track) teaching staff of the University of Trento has grown over the last six years. New colleagues, often coming from abroad, or with relevant research and teaching experiences in other prestigious universities, make an important contribution with new energies, both in support of new teaching initiatives and for developing important areas of research.

In recent years, important policies have been developed to support new professors or researchers at the University of Trento, such as an initial research budget allowing immediate independence and stimulating participation in competitive calls, as well as training tools and supports for teaching. This is a positive approach, which must be strengthened.

There is also a need to offer career opportunities for permanent staff, and in particular career opportunities for associate professors who have been granted the “abilitazione nazionale”, the requirement to be fulfilled in order to become full professor.

Furthermore, in order to facilitate the research activities, infrastructural support (laboratories, libraries, etc.) and active cooperation of technical and administrative staff are necessary.

Finally, I would like to stress the fundamental contribution of temporary researchers, assegnisti di ricerca and RTDa; their contribution is fundamental for many research activities, adding new ideas and strong motivation. We have a formative responsibility towards them and the effort for improving their inclusion in the academic community must be intensified through the Consulta dei dottorandi e assegnisti.

It is also our duty to ensure that the careers of researchers with temporary positions can evolve, consistently with their skills, into research permanent positions, in Trento or elsewhere.

### Technical, administrative and linguistic staff and collaborators

Among the reasons of our success in recent decades, there is undoubtedly the professional skills and commitment of the technical and administrative staff (PTA).

Nevertheless, some signs of hardship are visible now.

I believe that the motivation and sense of belonging of our staff, shown every day in many ways, is one of the University most valuable resources; every effort must be done to solve the problems that in some cases hinder an efficient and peaceful working activity. Furthermore, there is the possibility, thanks to our special autonomy, to negotiate economic incentives or advancements, as consequence of specific results.

The reforms have favoured the development of a model of organisation that clearly separates purely academic management (teaching, research, departments) from administrative management.

There is a common feeling, which I share, that this model needs to be modified and updated, to allow a more structured interaction between these two components. The ways to improve this model must be built together, not through a top-down approach. A greater participation of PTA in institutional boards could be useful, as well as further opportunities of discussion between management figures and the governing bodies.

At the institutional design level, I believe it would be appropriate to reflect on the possibility of a larger involvement of the university boards in defining the objectives of the management structures and in their periodic assessment, at least for the definition of priority strategic development lines.

All these possible changes are overlapping with the organizational methods of work, which in the coming years will profoundly change. We will have to transform remote work into smart working, redefining the organizational model, the tasks, the assessment system, the hierarchical model, the quality of the services and the relations with final users.

The bureaucratic tasks that burden on each member of the University has grown over time and is a source of stress, in particular for the PTA staff. Some solutions we have found for complying with national regulations can be improved. We must seriously pursue a process of simplification and computerization of procedures.

In recent times, we have witnessed with great concern the evolution of the contractual status and the economic and working repercussions, of people who are not employees of the University, working in essential services for academic activities, such as, for example, library services, reception and cleaning. The work of our supporting staff is important and precious for us. There are no ready-made solutions, but I believe that the Rector, representing the University, must work to find solutions for these problems.

## **Research**

The basis of University activity is research, because in order to produce, process and transmit knowledge in a critical way to students (training activity) and outside (knowledge transfer) it is necessary that this knowledge be the result of a research work.

The researchers working at the University of Trento must work under conditions that allow good quality research with international impact. It is the duty of the University to ensure that the essential infrastructures (laboratories, experimental facilities, libraries, etc.) are well functioning so that scientific research can develop.

In addition to the infrastructures for developing research, the University must promote the conditions for developing the most innovative and stimulating research, and this is favoured when research is interdisciplinary and integrates different cultural areas. The temporary mobility of researchers should be encouraged, especially abroad.

The University provides the working facilities for research, but it is the task of individuals and research groups to take action to find the necessary funding to support specific research projects, through participation in national or international competitive calls. In order to be successful in competitive projects in the future, there is a need to strengthen the support that the university provides in the project proposal and management phase. To support research, funding plans for the renewal of large equipment in the experimental laboratories must be resumed, but the university's bibliographic assets (books, magazines, digital material) must also be taken into consideration, because it is a fundamental tool for researchers in many different areas.

In addressing the issue of research, the problem of integrity clearly emerges. Aspects such as plagiarism, the accuracy and completeness of the experimental data, the recognition of contributions to scientific results by all research participants, are extremely important. Academy is a world where failure to recognize merits is outrageous. Merit, in research, is an indispensable value..

## **Teaching and lifelong learning**

Teaching is crucial for every University, and the visibility of each university is mainly linked to its training function.

Life-long learning will be the most significant change in the coming years, together with the evolution of teaching methods, particularly e-learning, which emerged strongly during the pandemic and which will have to be developed and integrated in our traditional teaching. More generally, we have to consolidate and rationalize our teaching offer, which has grown significantly over time, possibly with new initiatives in addition to those already planned, but also in some cases, radically update the existing teaching activity. The European University is a particularly relevant new innovative initiative, where we participate as members of the ECIU (European Consortium of Innovative Universities). This is a great opportunity to

take part in an important European network and develop new innovative teaching methods. In view of our international orientation, it will be necessary to strengthen and improve our training offer in English, strengthening also horizontal skills, especially linguistic ones.

As for the organizational aspects, a very important issue is that of the establishment of teaching “strutture di raccordo”, helping to rationalize and coordinate teaching loads in the various teaching programmes, many of which involve several departments.

### **Knowledge transfer**

The transfer of knowledge is an essential function of a modern university institution. The so-called “terza missione” means placing our knowledge at the service of the local, national and international community, in different and specific ways for each disciplinary area.

This is part of the innovation processes that our community expects from the academic world. Dialogue with political, economic and social institutions must align expectations as much as possible with what is reasonably possible to do. The University plays an increasingly fundamental role in accompanying the transformation processes of society, by helping citizens to develop the tools necessary to take advantage of innovation in a shared way, limiting inequalities and increasing social justice.

### **The institutional frame**

Finally, the institutional issue involves the possibility of updating our Statute, after some years of implementation. The most significant topic concerns a better definition of the role of the Consulta dei Direttori, some issues relating to the differentiation between Centri and Dipartimenti, the establishment of “strutture di collegamento” for interdepartmental teaching activities.

Finally, I would like to focus briefly on what I believe the role of the Rector should be, namely to guarantee and foster dialogue, in the interest of each individual member of the academic community, and of the institution as a whole.

The role of the Rector is not simply that of a leader: he/she must work so that transparency, collegiality and respect for each person always come first, alongside effectiveness and efficiency in the decisions. The role of Rector implies above all the service of the academic community based on intellectual honesty, respect, dialogue, and the search for unity.