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## The image of universities from the point of view of students and high school graduates

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## THE IMAGE OF UNIVERSITIES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF STUDENTS AND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

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### Introduction

In this article the most important results and conclusions from two surveys are presented. The first one is an internal survey conducted among the students of the University of Wrocław. The second one is a survey conducted among students of final grades of high schools located in Wrocław. Both surveys were conducted in the years 2007–2009 on the territory of Wrocław. Taking into consideration the purposes of this work, we will focus just on the most significant results and conclusions from the conducted surveys. Full set of data is available in a book discussing the results of a survey on self-presentation and the image of non-public higher education institutions<sup>1</sup> and in an article discussing the methodology and detailed results of a survey of the image of University of Wrocław<sup>2</sup>. The first of the presented surveys was carried out by a group of employees and students of the Institute of Journalism and Social Communication of the University of Wrocław, the author of this article belonged to. The second survey was the effect of a greater own project.

Due to the lack of comparable surveys concerning Polish universities, the survey which is presented in a limited extent in this article is pioneering in character and before reference data for other universities are obtained, it gives a foundation for drawing conclusions about the image of universities in Poland. The obtained results highlight expectations, open and hidden factors determining the choice of a university, praised and negatively assessed elements of a university's image, ideas about other Polish universities, reconstruction of the image of perfect university. The analysis of the collected data shows a few dimensions through which a university is regarded and through which the decision whether to choose this or that university is made. These dimensions are systemic and hierarchical and – depending on the situation other criteria are regarded as important.

### First survey – the image of the University of Wrocław among students

#### Surveyed issue

The main purpose of the survey was the reconstruction of the image of the University of Wrocław among one of the two internal groups – current students. For organizational reasons the first stage

*1 Grech, M. (2010). Komunikacja i wizerunek uczelni niepublicznych. Łódź.*

*2 Grech, M. (2011). Wyniki badania wizerunku Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego wśród jego studentów [in]: communication design magazine nr 1/2011, cd-magazine.uni.wroc.pl/arttykul/wyniki\_badania\_wizerunku\_uniwersytetu\_wroclawskiego\_wsrod\_jego\_studentow/.*

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of work was limited to students of full-time courses. However, there are plans for conducting a similar survey among remaining groups of opinion significant for the university.

### Basic concepts

The detailed theory of the image of an institution presented below is a part of a broader framework of constructive theories of communication and society<sup>3,4</sup>, which due to the characteristics of this article, won't be discussed here in detail.

In literature on the subject the image of an organization is described as unequivocal, contradiction-free image of an organization functioning on the market (of opinion – MG)<sup>5,6</sup> and this will be the definition assumed in this work. The image usually consists of opinion, knowledge, emotional approach and evaluation.

Image is created on the basis of the identity of an organization targeted at relevant social groups and in particular: their cognition and communication. From this point of view image is not only the assessment of an organization on a dichotomous scale, which needs to be emphasized here, because both approaches to the subject are present in literature on the subject. Research on image gives us a basis to reach conclusions about the functioning of an organization, and in particular about the way this functioning is regarded by relevant groups of opinion. This knowledge enables us to take targeted organizational and communicative actions which are supposed to adapt the organization and its communication to the expectations of the environment. As identity is understood as a system of traits and qualities typical of a given organization, which allow it to be distinguished from the competition and which secure orientation in the activities of an organization<sup>7</sup>, it is possible to influence the perception of an institution in the highlighted groups of opinion by means of internal and communication activities. It is necessary to remark here that only changes within an organization bring long-term results. Short-term information or advertising campaigns don't allow us to change especially the undesirable aspects of functioning of an organization, however, they may cause the emergence of various and contradictory images of the organization among particular groups.

### Similar research samples

As much as the author of the article knows, the manner of carrying out the survey, the scale and scope of the survey are unique, at least in Poland. Search in literature on the subject and Internet websites revealed two similar cases. First one is a „preliminary” survey of the cognitive image of the university on the basis of a survey conducted among students of the University of Wrocław by Olga Kępińska and Artur Maroń in 2006<sup>8</sup>. Even though the approach and the methodology of the surveys have many elements in common, the goals and scopes of these works differ substantially.

3 Fleischer, M. (2010). *Communication design czyli projektowanie komunikacji*. Łódź.

4 Luhmann N. (2007). *Systemy społeczne*, Kraków.

5 Fleischer M. (2003). *Corporate identity, public relations*. Wrocław, p. 108-109.

6 Herbst, D. (1998). *Corporate identity*. Berlin.

7 Fleischer M. (2003). *Corporate identity...*, op.cit., p. 111.

8 O. Kępińska, A. Maroń, *Kognitywny wizerunek uniwersytetu. Na podstawie badania ankietowego wśród studentów UW 2006 r.* [in:] *Kultura i Historia* nr 10/2006 <http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/148> found on 18.02.2009.

Internet search led to the research project of the University of Silesia in Katowice titled „Graduates – the best promoter of the University“. In this case the research team focuses mainly on the image of a graduate. Full results of the survey are not available. The published answers to the question about the reason for starting studies shows many similarities to the survey conducted in Wrocław.

### **Research methods**

The research was carried out by means of a standardized questionnaire including thirteen open questions, which were supposed to collect cognitive data. Moreover, one question scaling opinion about preparation for work and a set of 20 pairs of opposite adjectives matched on the basis of the rule of semantic differential. Before the start of the survey the questionnaire was tested on a group of students who later didn't take part in the survey. As the test survey didn't reveal any flaws in the questionnaire, the obtained data were included in the general pool of the results of the survey.

### **Selection of research sample**

Taking into consideration the characteristics of the general population of students, the decision was made to apply quota/probability proportional to size sampling at the level of 10% of a year, according to faculties, years (1, 3, 5 or 2nd year of supplementary MA studies), type of studies (MA and BA), sex of respondents. The main motivation for this choice is the assumption about recruitment of a population of students according to the functioning faculties and cyclical character of recruitment in the following years. Additionally, years and type of studies seem to have a potential impact on the way an institution is regarded and seem to display the following elements: external image – first year and internal – third year of BA studies and second year of supplementary MA studies (or 5th year of uniform studies). Such choice allows us both to investigate a complex entirety (from the 1st to the 5th year) as well as to highlight potential differences associated with the duration of studies. It also allows us to limit the number of groups of respondents subject to the survey, without eliminating the detailedness of the achieved results and the possibility of extrapolating them to the missing data.

At the time when the survey started, available data concerning the number of students of full-time courses in the academic year 2007/2008 showed that at 36 faculties there were a total of 20,345 students. The survey covered 1,166 students of full-time courses offered by the University of Wrocław.

The research team consisted of the following 15 people, in alphabetical order: Marcin Bartusik, Bogumił Dudczenko, Marta Grabeus, Maurycy Graszewicz, Michał Grech, Daniel Kazanecki, Maciej Kosiorek, Michał Kwiecień, Karolin Lachowska, Katarzyna Niemyska, Marcin Pielużek, Agnieszka Smółka, Magdalena Solka, Justyna Urban, Maja Żabokrzycka.

Moreover, dr Dominik Lewiński took part in the preparation of the concept of the research and Agnieszka Sekułowicz took part in collecting questionnaires at the faculty of philosophy. Help in organization was also provided by dr Marek Graszewicz. Thanks for substantial consultations go to dr Annette Siemes.

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## Results

The survey was conducted in the winter semester of the academic year 2008/2009, collection of data started on 14.10.2008 and was finished at the end of January 2009, before the start of the winter exam session. In this period over 1,500 filled-out questionnaires were collected, 1,166 correctly filled-out questionnaires (no more than 4 unanswered questions; complying with the requirements of the choice of sample) were qualified for further analysis.

### Statistical description of the surveyed group

Group of respondents consisted in 67.8% of women and in 31.8% of men. These proportions are motivated by the proportional choice of respondents compared to the population of students where the proportion is 65% to 35% and over the last two years the proportion has been stable (fluctuations in a range of 1%). Differences in proportions are compensated with the sizes of groups, which allows us to carry out quantitative analyses of each of them from many perspectives as an independent, numerous group of respondents.

Table 1. Distribution of the sex of respondents in the surveyed group

Sex	Number	Percentage
man	790	67,8
woman	371	31,8
Total	1161	99,6
Systemic shortage of data	5	0,4
Total	1166	100,0

Table 2. Cross table of age groups and the year of studies in the surveyed group

Age category / year	1	3	5	Total
18-20 years	408	22	0	430
21-22 years	29	286	17	332
23 - 24 years	13	38	271	322
25 - 30 years	4	2	38	44
No data	14	8	15	37
Total	468	356	341	1165

The last significant criterion describing the sample considering its internal variation is the type of studies. Also in this case the goal was to achieve representation proportionate to the entirety of the share of students, especially with regard to the division into two degrees of studies (BA and MA studies) and to consider in case of MA studies two variations: uniform studies and supplementary MA studies. When we look at where the students participating in supplementary MA courses at the University of Wrocław had their BA courses, it turns out that 51,5% of the surveyed studied at the University of Wrocław and 24% studied at another university. A similar group of respondents (24.5%) gave no answer to this

question.

After the presentation of the characteristics of the sample, we will discuss the results and conclusions from particular questions, according to their sequence in the questionnaire. Due to the limitations of form of this article, we abandoned detailed, tabular presentation of the results.

### **Research results – answers to questions about the image of the university.**

#### **Question 1. What do you think about, when you hear „University of Wrocław“?**

Questions about associations allow us to distinguish areas spontaneously associated with the University, and the first two places indicate the greatest importance of this question. The first place taken by answers from the category, 'prestige/reown' points to the main, common distinction of the University in the minds of individual students. At the same time the rate of participation in group of answers (almost 12%) and respondents (almost 37%) points to a rather high level of universality of the indicated quality. However, the comparison with the second question concerning the traits of the University, raises doubts whether the University of Wrocław is prestigious (4,8% and 12%, respectively) and whether it should be like this: 1,7% and 3,6% in the third question (what the University of Wrocław should be like).

It is worth asking about the sources of this prestige. Are these sources external for the University, as the University itself possesses them to a small degree. Among advantages „prestige“ is mentioned in 7.2% of answers and 14.8% of respondents, whereas in case of questions 5 and 8 – about factors which students take into consideration when choosing a university (15% - 16,5% of answers and 37% of respondents). According to students other people think that the University is prestigious/reowned (15% of answers and 25% of respondents). Summing up the above set of results, it is necessary to highlight the large share of external factors (other people) as a source of prestige of the University. It seems that students themselves do not necessarily share this conviction and when asked they repeat these convictions following the example of others.

The associations with knowledge and science seem to be an element of the assumed role of students at the University – learning and gaining knowledge as an individual experience. Third category on the list of loose associations concerns the lack of organization/bad organization, which may be a disconcerting phenomenon, as every sixth surveyed student shared this view. Such a high position of the response pointing to organizational shortcomings is an alarming phenomenon and should be thoroughly investigated in terms of its causes. The analysis of answers provided by particular departments shows in which departments most students shared this conviction: Netherlands philology 34%, French philology 13.1%, Spanish philology 14.6%, history 9.4%, psychology 11.1% and Polish philology 8.6%. These departments belong to two out of three biggest – in terms of number of students – faculties of the University: the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Historical and Pedagogical Sciences. What's interesting is that the students of the second biggest faculty – the Faculty of Law, Administration and Economy – don't report such problems to a comparable degree. Moreover, a quick analysis shows the growth of the number of respondents who recognize shortcomings in organization along with progression of age and year

of studies and reaches 20 and more percent of respondents from 3rd and 5th years of studies.

In the 'university' category students indicate that for them the University brings to their minds associations with school, 'alma mater' and other self-centred expressions. Within the category of building, respondents name Aula Leopoldina, nice buildings and the main building. Tradition takes the sixth position among the ranked responses of students of the University of Wrocław and concerns 4,4% of answers and 13,9% of respondents. At this point it is reasonable to close the analysis of responses essential for the collection.

## Question 2. What is the University of Wrocław like?

Table 3. Answers of respondents to the question: What is the University of Wrocław like?

What is UWr like?	Number	Percentage of answers	Percentage of respondents
big	253	8,6%	21,7%
old	243	8,3%	20,8%
unorganized	190	6,5%	16,3%
traditional	185	6,3%	15,9%
friendly	147	5,0%	12,6%
prestigious	140	4,8%	12,0%
fossilized	134	4,6%	11,5%
good	111	3,8%	9,5%
attractive	99	3,4%	8,5%
open	93	3,2%	8,0%
nice/liked	84	2,9%	7,2%
well-known	82	2,8%	7,0%
other negative	82	2,8%	7,0%
demanding	79	2,7%	6,8%
modern	60	2,0%	5,1%
dispersed	59	2,0%	5,1%
competent	56	1,9%	4,8%
unfriendly	44	1,5%	3,8%
interesting	41	1,4%	3,5%
theoretic/unpractical	35	1,2%	3,0%
poor	34	1,2%	2,9%
respected	28	1,0%	2,4%
organized	28	1,0%	2,4%
serious	27	0,90%	2,3%
boring	24	0,80%	2,1%
developed	21	0,70%	1,8%
other	523	17,8%	44,9%
don't know	7	0,20%	0,60%
lack of response	27	0,90%	2,3%
total	2936	100,0%	251,8%

The purpose of this question was to collect the answers of respondents showing the way they describe the University with adjectives and thus highlight their attributive generalization.

Most answers refer to the size and enormity of the institution – the University is big and great which makes the biggest and most persistent impression on the respondents, it is slightly stronger in case of students from the first year. This may suggest that at the beginning the respondents are unable to grasp the complexity of the institution. What's interesting is that this trait dominates the responses of students of biotechnology, physics and information sciences. The University is also often called old – in this case the response is more common among students of the last year of studies. Students of the first year are much less likely to call the University unorganized (-7% of answers) than the students finishing studies. First-year students are also much more likely to call the University friendly and open (over 15% of answers more) than students from the 3rd and 5th year of studies (-10%), which is less than the share of respondents in the sample would suggest. Other mentioned traits show certain tendency towards idealization of the University by students of the first year (friendly, open, well-known, nice, modern, good, interesting, liked, organized) and negative assessment by students finishing their studies (unorganized, fossilized, poor, boring, unfriendly, impractical). The assessments of students from the third year are also substantially stronger in some definitely negative points such as: fossilized, poor, boring, unfriendly, impractical, and the biggest set of other negative traits which cannot be categorized (an exception is the trait, respected'). Responses of the third year are also to the smallest degree conventionalized, or in other words, most individual, which is shown by the highest percentage of answers in the 'other' category.

At this point the most important question is whether differences in responses between the first and the fifth year come from the accumulation of experience or perhaps from changes in the functioning of the University. Considering the distribution of data and the convergence of answers of the 3rd and 5th year, it seems clear that the first option (experience) is very likely. This, in turn, is bad news for the University as it seems that the enthusiasm of first-year students turns into ever more negative approach in the following years. This situation is alarming especially considering problems with recruitment of future young scientists, as well as students. Moreover, in case of a crisis it is hard to count on positive attitude and good will of (discouraged) students. Analyzing the obtained answers, looking at their generally positive or negative tones, it is possible to identify the following result. Positive answers (friendly, prestigious, good, nice, open, well-known, liked, modern, interesting, organized, respected) constitute about 33% of answers. At the same time negative answers (traditional, unorganized, fossilized, dispersed, unfriendly, impractical, poor, boring and other negative) constitute about 25% of answers. Traits which it is hard to clearly classify (old, big, serious) give a total of 18% of answers. Thus, it is apparent that even though there are more positive than negative traits, they don't constitute an independently dominant group.



### Question 3. What should the University of Wrocław be like?

Table 4. Answers of the respondents to the question about the desired traits of the University of Wrocław

What should UWr be like?	Number	Percentage of answers	Percentage of respondents
modern	365	14,7%	31,3%
friendly	345	13,8%	29,6%
organized	254	10,2%	21,8%
open	196	7,9%	16,8%
practical	98	3,9%	8,4%
such as it is now	52	2,1%	4,5%
rich	52	2,1%	4,5%
buildings in one place and renovated	51	2,0%	4,4%
high level	45	1,8%	3,9%
better	43	1,7%	3,7%
prestigious	42	1,7%	3,6%
accessible	40	1,6%	3,4%
developing	40	1,6%	3,4%
communicative	38	1,5%	3,3%
better-equipped	35	1,4%	3,0%
competent	32	1,3%	2,7%
dynamic	30	1,2%	2,6%
demanding	29	1,2%	2,5%
innovative	29	1,2%	2,5%
helpful	27	1,1%	2,3%
interesting	26	1,0%	2,2%
traditional	24	1,0%	2,1%
others	526	21,10%	45,10%
don't know	17	0,70%	1,5%
lack of response	55	2,2%	4,7%
total	2491	100,0%	213,6%

Students expect above all that the university should be modern (above all students from the 3rd and 5th year). Students from the first year mention this expectation much less frequently, which may, similarly as answers to the second question, be evidence of deficiencies of the University. The expectation of friendliness, just as the expectations of openness and wealth, is more or less proportionately distributed in the following years of studies. Thus, it seems that this is a general expectation, which is confirmed by answers to the question number 13 about the ideal university. However, what is interesting and sheds new light on the perceived deficiency of organization of the University (in question 2) is that the first year is displaying ever greater expectation of good organization and, as can be presumed, this expectation is not satisfied. Among 5th year students the expectation of practicality and prestige is much greater than their share in the sample suggests. Only 1st year students display much higher level of acceptance than of expectations concerning the current condition of the University. Other students don't share this

opinion. Moreover, for people starting studies, the University, apart from being well organized (also with regard to buildings) and demanding, should also be interesting and accessible. Whereas, during studies the expectations of ‚helpfulness‘, competence and justice are reported, by the end of studies the already mentioned practicality, prestige, progressiveness and dynamics of a university gain importance.

#### **Question 4. What areas of study do you associate with the University of Wrocław?**

The most often mentioned area of study is law, which has a dominant position, much higher than the next area – history – which is mentioned 2.5-times less often than law. There are no such differences between the following, most often mentioned areas – Polish philology, administration, psychology and mathematics – however, they can still be regarded as the most recognizable areas of study.

The comparison of the position of an area of study in the hierarchy of recognizability to its position in terms of number of students brings interesting results. Comparing these figures we can identify areas which are regarded as bigger than they „really“ are and areas which are overlooked despite a significant number of students. Generally, it is possible to notice a relation between the size of an area of study with the number of times it is mentioned (Spearman’s rank correlation ratio of 0,84), however, some areas show positive deviations from this relation. The most visible areas of study in comparison to student numbers are: psychology (up by 17 positions), culture sciences and archeology (+7), history, mathematics, information sciences (+6). Lower positions in the rank list of recognition, compared to the size of the area of study are occupied by: Slavic philology (down 16 positions), protection of environment (-12), pedagogics (-8 positions) as well as French philology (-7) and German philology (-6). It is also necessary to mention here that some of the respondents gave a general answer „philology“, which on the one hand could support these areas of philology which are undervalued in terms of image, but on the other hand it means that respondents are not aware of their existence – they don’t distinguish between philologies which are not clear for them. This seems to be an indicator of the problem of students’ insufficient knowledge about the offer of some faculties or areas of study. A more detailed discussion of this issue goes beyond the scope of this work.

#### **Questions 5. What made you decide to start studying at the University of Wrocław?**

The fifth question focuses on the declared reasons for choosing the University of Wrocław and shows a range of elements taken into consideration by the respondents. Apart from such reasons as prestige (renown) mentioned already in the previous questions, the distance/proximity of place of residence, the city in which a university is located (in this case Wrocław) and location which can be summed up as factors – all of these answers together constitute 26.5% of responses and thus place at the second place among summed up categories. If we sum up the categories associated with „good opinion“: „prestige, opinion, the best“, they give a total of 30% of responses and are the most important general category. The two biggest categories combined cover over 56% of all responses, which allows us to generalize that over a half of reasons for the choice of the University are associated with the opinion about it

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and the place where it is located. If we convert this data to respondents, it will turn out that potentially these responses concern all students.

Second to the aspect of location in the hierarchy of important factors determining the choice of a university is the 'area of study', which is often associated with interests, level (at the University or faculty) and prospects for the future. It is possible to obtain interesting results thanks to comparative research with another university in Wrocław or other cities. Comparing answers to this question with responses to question 1, about associations with the University of Wrocław, the stable position of prestige/good opinion as a factor determining the choice of university and associations becomes apparent. Other factors important for the choice of the University of Wrocław are associated mainly with its location that the University itself cannot influence in any way. However, whether and where the University enjoys a good reputation already belongs to the sphere of activity of the department of communication. As research shows, it is necessary to take care of it, as change of opinion about the prestige and level of the University should be reflected both in the number and quality of entrants.

Analyzing internal relations within the question, the following associations were identified:

If the first response was 'prestige', the second one was proximity/distance 17,7%, area of study 14,6%, level 11%, city 9,6%, location 9%. If the first answer was 'proximity/distance', the second one was: prestige/renown 33%, area of study 11%, level 7,6%. If the first answer was 'city', the second one was: prestige/renown 29%, area of study 14%, proximity/distance 14%, level 10%. If the first given answer was 'area of study', the second one was: city 19%, location 17%, prestige/renown 14%, proximity/distance 14%, university 7%. If the answer level was given as first, the second was: prestige 22%, proximity/distance 18,6%, area of study 10%, city 8,5%, location 8,5%, opinion of friends 8,5%, prospects 6%. If the first given answer was 'location', the second one was: prestige 28%, areas of study 16%, the best 16%, level 12%. If the first answer was 'opinions of theirs', the second one was: the best 17%, location and proximity 10% each and prestige 7,5%.

If we tried to work out an algorithm of significance of elements associated with the choice of university, we would have to point above all to: opinion/renown, distance from the place of residence/city, area of study associated with interests. In the current situation, when new areas of study are established at the same time in different cities and at different universities, the factor raising competitive advantage over other universities, is the opinion and prestige/renown a particular university enjoys. According to students the University is renowned, however, as has been mentioned, it is not its main trait. Moreover, as was shown above, after spending a few years at the University students come to a conclusion that the University could be more prestigious and some of the aspects of its organization should be improved.

### **Question 6. What are the advantages of the University of Wrocław?**

The question about advantages was supposed to highlight positive elements of the structure of the image of the University of Wrocław – on average two answers. They focus mainly on the staff, which for the first time appears among important responses in this survey. The remaining elements already had

a major share in previous questions and prestige was most often associated with the University of Wrocław, level, location and city, proximity/distance in question 5 about the reasons for choice of studies at the University of Wrocław, tradition and history in questions 1., 2. The response „open“ is at a level comparable to responses to question 2. about the characteristics of the University.

Thus, staff seems to be the strongest, positively distinguished part of the University. Apart from staff students name mainly factors which are important for the choice of studies and the University and as these factors were discussed in detail in points 2. and 5. we won't discuss them again at this point.

### **Question 7. What are the disadvantages of the University of Wrocław?**

Students of the University of Wrocław were most critical about shortcomings in organization: in courses, administration as well as location of buildings (and their standard) – these answers constitute together almost 30% of answers and twice as many respondents. Moreover, students also complain about stagnation and anachronism. Among the biggest problems there are also: too much focus on theory and not enough focus on practice, as well as problems with scholarships, dean's offices, flow of information and approach to the student. These points highlight the biggest problems that students have to cope with. It is necessary to take care of these issues in order to not lose the chance to achieve an image of the University of Wrocław as a modern university taking care of students and as the results of the survey show these are very important factors for the perception of the University.

Disadvantages are mentioned almost as often as advantages – there are almost two per person.

### **Question 8. What factors do students take into consideration when choosing a university?**

In question 8 students were asked to name factors other students took into consideration in the process of choosing a university. The goal of the question is not to find out to what extent the surveyed know the opinions of their colleagues, but rather to obtain responses, which due to the strength of discourse (that is, the things that should be said) were not given in question 5. These are the following elements: rankings of universities, future job opportunities, whether it is easy to get into a university and graduate. Other responses are at a level comparable with question 5.

It can be concluded that at the University of Wrocław you are not supposed to talk about rankings in newspapers, especially those associated with future career opportunities and that you know or hope that it is easy to graduate. Whereas the first factor is important, as it highlights secret criteria for the candidates' choice of university, the second factor, even though equally important, is disconcerting in the long term.

### **Question 9. What is a student of the University of Wrocław like?**

The traits highlighted by the respondents seem to be generally positive, only six traits are not unequivocally positive and the first one of them – tired – placed 11th on the list of frequency. Positive traits represent a quite broad spectrum with the most important concerning: openness, assiduity, intelligence,

ambition and easiness. The further part of idealization is associated with friendliness, education, joyfulness and wisdom.

Negative traits are in a way symmetrical and are associated mainly with excessive amount of work, unwillingness to work, self-centredness and poverty.

The combination of these traits allows us to reconstruct the image of a 'student' which contains: openness/easiness/friendliness (self-centredness – on the negative side), assiduity (often excessive amount of work and tiredness), intelligence, ambition, education/wisdom.

#### **Question 10. What is a lecturer of the University of Wrocław like?**

The question about the traits of a lecturer of the University of Wrocław reveals the aspects used by students to build a generalized image of a lecturer. Similarly as in case of self-portrait of students, the image is predominantly positive, however, negative traits come up faster – already at the fourth place. They concentrate on the aspect of relation with students (boring/arrogant) or the lack of relation (lack of contact). As much as the last trait can be regarded as marginal, the first and the second deserve more attention.

Positive traits are associated mainly with competences (education, preparation - together 13,4% of answers. and 33% of respondents), demanding (7% and 17%), approach to students (nice, friendly, open, helpful, entertaining, understanding - altogether 14,3% and 33%) and intellect (intelligent, wise 5,2% and 13,3%).

#### **Question 11. Does the University of Wrocław prepare You for professional career?**

This question was one of two closed questions in the whole survey. The following table highlights general trends in the assessment of suitability of studies for (future) professional career.

**Table 5. Respondents' answers to the question:  
Does the University of Wrocław prepare You for professional career?**

<b>Does the University prepare You for professional career?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Percentage of valid responses</b>	<b>Cumulated percentage</b>
definitely yes	89	7,6	7,7	7,7
rather yes	448	38,4	38,6	46,3
yes	129	11,1	11,1	57,4
no	66	5,7	5,7	63,0
rather not	228	19,6	19,6	82,7
definitely not	92	7,9	7,9	90,6
don't know	109	9,3	9,4	100,0
Total	1161	99,6	100,0	
Systemic data loss	5	0,4		
Total	1166	100,0		

There is an apparent tendency to confirm suitability, which covers slightly more than half of respondents (57,4% of summed up answers, 'yes', 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes'). One third (33,3%) gave negative answers to the question.

The tendency becomes apparent especially when we compare 'yes' and 'no' answers with 'rather yes' and 'rather not', the proportions of these groups of answers consistently amount to about 1,95. What's interesting is that groups of respondents saying 'definitely yes' or 'not' are almost equal (7,6% and 7,9%). Thus, subtracting extreme groups, for every two satisfied students there is one who is not satisfied with preparation for professional career obtained during the studies. This seems to be a considerable proportion and it exceeds the average, which would suggest a 1 to 1 proportion. However, it seems reasonable to ask a question about the University's approach to this issue. Does the University want to educate people who are only twice as likely to assess their preparation for professional career as sufficient rather than as insufficient?

Looking for internal factors responsible for this state of affairs, we should focus above all on the year of studies: the higher the year, the more students claim that studies don't prepare them for professional career (1st year definitely not – 6.5%, 3rd year – 44%, 5th year – 49%). At the same time the number of people claiming studies prepare them for professional career drops: out of respondents claiming that studies definitely prepare them for professional career 67% are 1st year students (in the sample they constitute just 40%), whereas in the 3rd year just 22% of the group and only 10% in the 5th year.

### **Question 12. What in your opinion do people think about the University of Wrocław?**

This question, similarly as question 8, was supposed to obtain the opinions about the University that the surveyed students have, but don't want to share them as their own opinions. At this point it is necessary to emphasize that this is a question with one of the lowest average numbers of answers per respondent – 1,66.

There were no significant new answers that appeared for the first time in this question. This can be explained above all with the number of this question – 12. There were many opportunities for negative aspects to appear previously. Thus, the most interesting are the elements which appear very often or more often than in previous questions.

The answer 'ambitious/demanding' appears for the first time in the context of the University of Wrocław itself, earlier it appeared as the most important trait of a lecturer of the University. What's important is that also the trait 'undemanding' appears, which suggests that students would agree that the University of Wrocław is „ambitious/demanding“. At the same time 'high level' appeared earlier as an expectation of students in question 3 (What should the University of Wrocław be like?), thus it seems that the level could be slightly higher, so that students themselves would emphasize it. The situation is similar in case of traits like 'modern' and 'open' as well as 'unpractical', even though the importance of the problem is not that high. The remaining answers fall below the threshold of relevance assumed in the survey – 5% of respondents.

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### **Question 13. What should an ideal university be like?**

The question is supposed to reconstruct the students' idea of a perfect university. The image revealed from the results seem to be very simple: first of all, it has to be student-oriented, it has to be open to his needs, friendly. Second thing is that it needs to be active in taking up actions in order to be up to date, it has to undergo constant changes (modern, active) and the third thing is that it should focus on practical development and demand practice rather than learning theory by heart.

Further aspects concern good organization, equipment and computers and not creating barriers in accessibility and availability for everyone, especially not creating financial barriers.

Comparing these answers, with the current perception of the University of Wrocław, it is possible to point to differences which may become directions of changes above all in the attitude of students, modernity, practical usefulness of the obtained knowledge for future professional career, better organization of work at the university and better equipment.

It is also important to point out here that the current characteristics of the University to some extent overlap with the idea of perfection, especially in the aspect of competences of lecturers, openness (university and lecturers). It seems that the most serious issue are weaknesses of organization of work at the University.

### **Question 14. What makes the University of Wrocław different than other Polish universities?**

Respondents asked about what distinguishes the University of Wrocław from other Polish universities point to five most important groups of factors associated with: location, prestige, tradition, level, requirements, positive atmosphere and good staff. All of the above-mentioned elements seem to be positive or at least not negative. All of these elements contribute to the image of the University of Wrocław and here they are strengthened/emphasized. It is possible here to point to the lack of external elements, which would go beyond the pattern of thinking that other people share our opinion.

The group of negative answers (worse, bad organization, dispersed around the city, bad staff) includes 7.6% of responses and 12% of respondents and even though the numbers aren't big, they point to the weak sides of the University of Wrocław from the point of view of its students: level, approach to students and equipment.

In this question the biggest group of people – over 27% - didn't express their opinions (,don't know' and ,lack of answer') which due to the character of the question is surprising. Comparing this with the conclusions from the first paragraph, it seems there is lack of knowledge about the broader context, including other universities among respondents and resorting to general opinions (prestige, tradition) or the analysis of name or the proximity of place of residence (Wrocław).

### **Question 15. The intensity of particular traits of the University.**

Below only the most significant characteristics of this question are discussed. This part of the survey involved presenting the respondents with selected pairs of traits arranged in a five-degree scale,

where on the left side of the scale there was a trait located to the left of a pair, on the right a trait located in a table to the right of a pair. Every trait had two levels of intensity: very and quite, in the middle there was the option to not choose any of the traits. Respondents were asked to mark the intensity of a trait on a two-degree scale in each direction (or zero). A detailed example of a questionnaire is provided in the attachment. Below (Picture 1) just a fragment of this part of the questionnaire is shown.

Picture 1. Fragment of the questionnaire

**University of Wrocław is:**  
**(Select the appropriate flow characteristics)**

	very	rather	or or	rather	very	
old	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	young
female	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	male

Table 6. A set of the most important statistics for the pairs of traits referring to the University of Wrocław – differential scale from 1 to 5. The question was: The University of Wrocław is: ....

The University of Wrocław is: (the intensity of traits given in pairs)	N	Average	Standard mistake of the average	Standard deviation
undemanding/demanding	1163	3,74	0,03	1,067
practical/theoretical	1161	3,44	0,04	1,184
uncomplicated/complicated	1157	3,34	0,03	1,009
organized/chaotic	1165	3,21	0,04	1,240
unpredictable/predictable	1159	3,07	0,03	1,061
rich/poor	1161	2,90	0,03	1,072
brave/cowardly	1149	2,79	0,03	0,84
consistent	1160	2,76	0,03	1,024
feminine/masculine	1157	2,76	0,02	0,76
communicative/non-communicative	1159	2,62	0,03	1,041
active/passive	1161	2,45	0,03	1,041
open/closed	1161	2,40	0,03	1,026
friendly/hostile	1162	2,35	0,03	0,9
serious/relaxed	1164	2,20	0,03	0,98
competent/incompetent	1162	2,19	0,03	0,9
liked/not liked	1161	2,18	0,02	0,84
pretty/ugly	1159	2,13	0,03	0,93
traditional	1164	2,12	0,03	0,97
wise/stupid	1155	1,99	0,02	0,82
old/young	1156	1,86	0,02	0,74



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Considering the distribution of averages the following can be recognized as the strongest traits: first of all, four traits from the top (demanding, theoretical, complicated, chaotic) and from the bottom of the table (nice, traditional, wise, old). They have the highest values of averages and substantially deviate from the average of the set – 2,63, when the average deviation is 0,51.

The highest coherence of answers provided by respondents appears in traits like: liked, wise, old, competent, friendly and pairs such as: feminine/masculine, brave/cowardly, where the average doesn't allow us to identify the dominant part of a pair.

Comparing the most significant and coherent traits we get a set of the strongest traits of the University of Wrocław according to the average and unequivocalness of assessment at the same time: wise, old, competent, liked and demanding, complicated, but rather serious and predictable. The traits 'chaotic' and 'theoretical' are the strongest, but also show greatest differences between groups of respondents.

Other traits should be treated as not significant for the construction of the image of the University of Wrocław.

### **Summary of the first part**

To sum it up briefly, the data and the conclusions presented above allow us to draw an outline of the structure of image of the University of Wrocław and highlight the most significant issues and problems, as well as threats emerging from the analyses.

Thus, the most important elements of the structure of the University are: prestige/renown (7), tradition (5), location (3): in the city of Wrocław, close to the students' place of residence, demanding (4) and maintaining a certain level (3) at the same time friendliness(2). Apart from this the University of Wrocław is regarded as: old (2), big (2) and rather pretty.

The biggest advantages of the University mentioned by the students are: staff (3): good, competent, educated, friendly. At the same time there are such problems as: lack of organization (3), bureaucracy, fossilization/backwardness and insufficient focus on practice – courses preparing for future professional career. Moreover, students point to the ambiguity of procedures for the student and the location of University buildings in diverse places around the city.

In this situation, the following main directions of changes/development are suggested: improving internal organization and communication, gradual adaptation to the student and focusing on preparing students for a professional career. Being up to date – modernity and providing adequate equipment.

A potential problem is the lack of unique distinguishing traits of the University of Wrocław compared to other universities. The answers provided by the respondents provide a rather positive image, which is based to a large extent on unspecific general opinions and location of the University. Among these traits there is nothing that would distinguish the University in any special way. Comparing the answers to all questions, it is possible to notice low agreement of respondents on key issues, it very rarely (apart from question 13 about the perfect university) exceeds 10-15% of answers, which shows the image of the University is blurred. Even though for students the image is clear, it is not clearly outlined. At the

same time it is obvious what ideal the University should pursue: it should be focused on the students. It is advisable to carry out further comparative research with other universities in Poland. This would allow us to compare results and thus define common image framework of Polish universities.

The analysis of the average number of answers per person to particular questions, shows that the most developed aspects of the image are: associations (3,1), what is a student of the University like (2,7) what is a lecturer of the University like (2,5), what makes other people choose a particular university (2,6), what is the University like (2,5), the least-developed aspects are – what makes University of Wrocław different than other universities (1,5) and what do others think about the University (1,6). Thus, students are least likely to answer questions about the external perception of their university and they are most eager to answer questions about the own associations and projections concerning their university.

### **Second survey – the perception of the University among high school students.**

In course of the research on the image of the University among future students, a survey was carried out on a group of students of final grades of high schools in Wrocław, who declared that they wanted to continue their education and go to a university. Below the goals and assumptions, its course, results and conclusions are presented.

#### **Goals of the survey**

The goals of the survey carried by means of questionnaires were:

- investigating the spectrum of ideas associated with higher education institutions and in particular with the semantics of the two most common expressions functioning as the name of a whole category: uczelnia (university), szkoła wyższa (higher education institution) (ed. the translation of these two terms is provided for the purpose of information only. As the survey refers to the perception of two Polish words that have no direct equivalents in English language, they will be left in original where necessary in the further part of the text.)
- investigating the semantic field of public universities (and non-public),
- learning about the declared preferences with regard to the choice of the future university,
- investigating the expectation of students with regard to their future university,
- reconstruction of a list of reasons for the choice of a university by future students.

#### **Method**

The survey was carried out in January 2007 by means of questionnaires distributed among the students of three high schools in Wrocław. The questionnaires were filled out during lessons, in line with arrangements made with teachers and school headmasters. The choice of high schools was random. The survey covered high schools number 1, 9 and 21 in Wrocław. The goal of the choice of the sample was to secure high diversification and obtain a broad spectrum of responses.

Questionnaires were distributed to the students. The students were asked to fill out the questionnaires

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individually. Before students started filling out the questionnaires, the goal of the survey, the way of filling out the questionnaires, returning the questionnaires were discussed. Students were also assured that the survey was anonymous. 140 properly filled out questionnaires were obtained. The questionnaires were later analyzed.

Considering the goals of this work, below only some questions are analyzed (full data available in Grech<sup>9</sup>).

## **Results**

### **Answers to the question: What do You think of, when you hear the word ,uczelnia'?**

The respondents' associations with the word ,uczelnia' are above all: studies, learning, school and university, fun and people. Each of the two first categories is mentioned by at least 30 percent to respondents and in total they constitute 40 percent of all answers.

### **Answers to the question: What do You think of, when You hear ,szkoła wyższa'?**

In this case the associations of the surveyed students are less diversified than in case of associations with the word ,uczelnia'. The remaining two significant differences are, first of all, half as numerous as two biggest and the same categories of answers (studies, science) and second thing is the exchange of the word uczelnia for szkoła wyższa in the respondents' answers. The above differences may suggest partial equivalence of semantic fields of the surveyed expressions and point to greater conventionality of the word uczelnia. The remaining answers distinguishing the two surveyed words (fun, young people, adulthood on the one hand, money and work on the other) highlight fields of distinction, which fluctuate within 5 percent of respondents.

Below the threshold of 2 percent of answers and 3 percent of respondents were the following categories appearing most often in answers to other questions: lectures, requirements, level, worse place, education.

### **Answers to the question: Public universities are:**

Answers to the question about the characteristics of public universities highlight a few areas: first of all the issue of fees (33 percent of respondents and 22 percent of responses), second thing is that there are good, very good and better universities (28 percent of respondents and 19,2 percent of answers), third thing is limited access to studying at these universities (17,2 and 11,5) third thing is that they enjoy better recognition and greater prestige (10,0 and 6,7) , as well as high level and requirements. There are also negative evaluations (5,0 and 3,3) and rarely opinions about lack of care about students (3,6 and 2,4).

### **Answers to the question: What traits would you attribute to a university You would like to go to?**

Answers to the question about the desired traits highlight the following most important areas:

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<sup>9</sup> M. Grech, *Komunikacja i wizerunek...*, op. cit.

prestige (25 percent of respondents), friendly attitude towards students and good atmosphere (30), high level and requirements as well as reliability and integrity. Almost every fifth future student has no clearly defined expectations (17 percent) and about the same number of respondents give the answer good, without specifying what this adjective is supposed to refer to. It was also noticed that respondents equally often want their future university to be modern as they want it to be traditional. The following table presents categories of answers which have a greater than 5-percent share in the group of respondents, other categories due to their accidental character are not subject to analysis, but are available in the electronic database attached to the work.

**Table 7. Answers of students of high schools in Wrocław to the question:  
Traits of the university You would like to go to**

<b>Traits of the university You would like to go to</b>	<b>frequency</b>	<b>Percentage of answers</b>	<b>Percentage of responses</b>
prestige	36	10,6	25,7
friendly	33	9,7	23,6
good	25	7,3	17,86
lack of answer	24	7,0	17,1
high level	20	5,9	14,3
demanding	16	4,7	11,4
reliable	15	4,4	10,7
interesting	13	3,8	9,29
good staff	11	3,2	7,86
well-known	11	3,2	7,86
good preparation for professional career	10	2,9	7,14
educates	10	2,9	7,14
good atmosphere	9	2,6	6,43
modern	8	2,3	5,71
tradition	8	2,3	5,71
others	92	27,0	65,7
total	341	100	243,57

#### **Answers to the question: What do You expect from your future university?**

Answers point to high diversification, however, it is possible to distinguish between a few main subjects: first of all, good preparation for professional career (30,7), second thing is education, including: good and at a high level (29,3% of respondents), third thing is approach to the student, understanding and good atmosphere (14,2). Others below 3 percent of respondents: international exchange, professional approach, diligence, entry.

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## Answers to the question: What do You take into consideration in the process of choosing a university?

When final grade students were asked the question: „What do You take into consideration in the process of choosing a university?“, the data presented in the following table were obtained.

**Table 8. Answers of high school students to the question:  
What do You take into consideration in the process of choosing a university?**

<b>Factors taken into consideration</b>	<b>frequency</b>	<b>percentage of answers</b>	<b>percentage of respondents</b>
area of study	46	19,4	32,9
interests	24	10,1	17,1
quality of teaching	20	8,4	14,3
future career	20	8,4	14,3
opinions	15	6,3	10,7
prestige	15	6,3	10,7
manner of recruitment	12	5,1	8,6
location	11	4,6	7,9
requirements	10	4,2	7,1
recruitment requirements	9	3,8	6,4
future / personal plans	8	3,4	5,7
number of candidates per place at university	6	2,5	4,3
lack of answer	5	2,1	3,6
others	36	15,3	25,7
total	237	100	169,3

What we can see are answers associated with the area of study and interests, which may be regarded as associated with each other through the subject they concern. Further, universities are regarded from the point of view of the quality of education, future career as well as opinion and prestige.

Future students are less likely to see what current students emphasize: location in a particular city and don't appreciate the prestige of the University that much. This difference can be explained with the fact that the surveyed students who come from Wrocław or the surroundings of Wrocław, assume that they will study at a university located in Wrocław. Due to this assumption they don't have the problem of choice of the city, which is important for students coming also from outside Wrocław.

## Conclusion

Summing up conclusions from two surveys concerning the perception of university by university students and high school students, I would like to start with a statement that if we assume that the University of Wrocław and its students (current and future) are not exceptional compared to other Polish universities and their students (both current and future) the obtained results can be treated as an initial diagnosis of the image of universities in Poland.

Obviously, it is necessary to verify this diagnosis by means of comparative research taking into consideration local characteristics of particular universities – however, the assumption of comparable uniformity of the structure of university in the Polish society seems justified taking into consideration the systemic theories of the society and communication mentioned at the start of the article.

The analysis of the obtained results revealed the following basic dimensions through which the surveyed perceive and communicate about universities:

**1. prestige** and the opinion of others in the broad meaning, here both the opinions of other students and graduates as well as media rankings,

**2. size** is most likely one of the basic dimensions transferred from the three-dimensional space and items, combined with age, it highlights the character of a university, its expanse or the number of students,

**3. age** seems to be important as an indicator of credibility and prestige, especially in combination with another dimension – tradition,

**4. tradition**, and more precisely whether it is there, how long it is and what the attitude towards it is, it is also quite a simple signal pointing to the norms, values prevailing at a given university. It seems that this dimension is associated with a rather frequently mentioned pair of traits: fossilization – modernity, which seem to be some of the recently significant concepts distinguishing institutions and products,

**5. staff**, employees, both academic and office employees – students meet them every day and on the basis of these experiences form their opinions about values, rules and attitudes present at a university,

**6. approach to people**, even though it is mentioned as 6th point, it seems to be one of the most significant dimensions, especially if you pay attention to the fact that science is a relation between students and teachers. The surveyed mention friendliness, openness, availability as the most significant aspects of approach.

**7. location** is associated with the distance from the current place of residence (most often family). Whereas some of the surveyed people seem to regard small distance as an advantage, other surveyed people, especially students pointed out that they find distant locations more interesting.

**8. areas of study associated with profession and interests of students**,

**9. practicality and usefulness for work** is a very important dimension for the surveyed (both high school students and university students). Often mentioned in opposition to theory which is regarded as something of no use in future life and professional career,

**10. organization, buildings, facilities** are very important subjects for students. Times when studies were only about the relation student – professor are apparently a thing of the past,

**11. quality of teaching, requirements for students** – perhaps, this subject is not mentioned by the surveyed often, but it seems to be one of the factors distinguishing between ‚better‘ and ‚worse‘ universities,

**12. course of recruitment and the easiness or possibility of matriculation** is a condition for entry and one of two-three important differences between public and private universities.

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In the end it is worth going back to the results of the analysis of the question about the perfect university, as they highlight a concept rectified through idealization.

The answers of students show clearly that the most important elements of the idea of a perfect university are: student-oriented approach, openness to the students' needs and friendliness. Second thing: active approach, striving to be up to date (changing, modern, active), third thing: university should focus on practical development and require useful knowledge, rather than learning theory by heart.

Further aspects concern good organization, equipment and avoiding barriers in availability and openness to everyone, especially avoiding financial barriers.

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