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*National Academies and National Strategies**

Abstract

The scientific activities in a country, especially one relatively poor and underdeveloped, are best carried out within a framework of a *national strategy* for research and development. The same is true, maybe to a lesser degree, for the various fields of arts. Very important are the national strategies for the development of the educational system (especially that of higher education) which, needless to say, is the basis for the formation of future „workers” in both sciences and arts.

The author is convinced that the national strategies should not be mere statements of good intentions or an arbitrary choice of fields and/or activities but be based on a serious analysis of both the national *needs* and the available national *resources* (human and infrastructural). The needs in question should not be exclusively utilitarian, neglecting the fundamental research resulting with a **new knowledge**.

If the national strategies are to be sustainable, they should be truly **national** rather than **political** in nature and should not be abandoned on every change of the political elite in power and replaced by a new set of strategies.

In view of the concentration of wisdom and experience, it would seem that the national academies are preeminently suitable to be the locus for the preparation of national strategies.

The academies should feel obliged to have their own strategies as well, especially regarding the recruitment of young (er) scientists and artist into their ranks. In many academies the problem is solved by establishing (or keeping) a category of *corresponding members*, a description that is not reflecting the true status and duties of these members. In the

* The paper is printed as submitted.

opinion of the author, a much better solution is to set up a unit, similar to that existing in the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and named, there, **The Young Academy**. The exact modalities of the functioning of such a unit may, of course, vary and be suited to the local needs.

The scientific activities in a country, especially one relatively poor and underdeveloped, are best carried out within a framework of a *national strategy* for research and development. The same is true, maybe to a lesser degree, for the various fields of arts. Very important are the national strategies for the development of the educational system (especially that of higher education) which, needless to say, is the basis for the formation of future „workers” in both sciences and arts. For the academies themselves it is essential to have their own strategies – where do they want to go, how to keep intact the potential to perform in accord with their mission and their duties and how to increase that potential.

So, let us go step by step.

The strategy for *any subject* is something of a roadmap based on the considerations related to the environment (regulations and statues, funding, politics etc), the existing structure, systems, resources, stakeholders and the prevalent societal culture (Fig. 1)

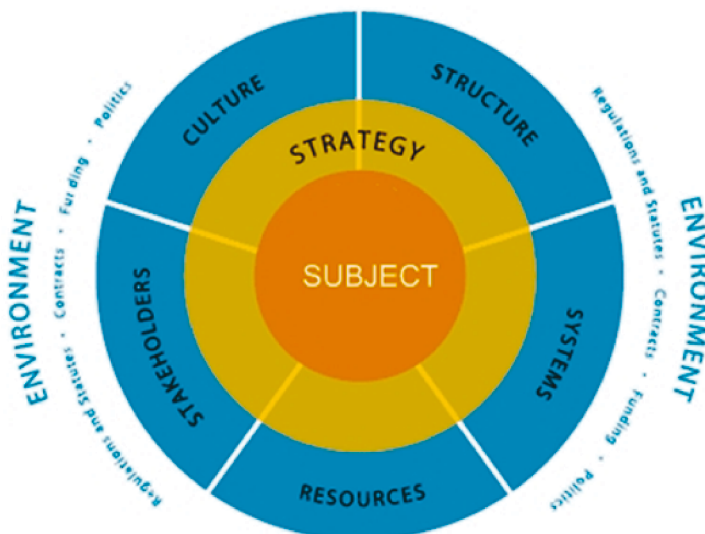


Fig. 1. A graphical representation of the elements to be taken into consideration for any strategy

All these elements should be carefully analyzed and on the basis of such an analysis the first drafts of the strategy in question should be set up. The draft would be then a source of new ideas which would have to be analyzed and the results of such an analysis included in the initial version of the strategy. Proceeding iteratively, the content of the strategy should be improved and brought closer to its final version.

The author is convinced¹ that the national strategies should not be mere statements of good intentions or an arbitrary choice of fields and/or activities but be based on a serious analysis of both the national *needs* and the available national *resources* (human and infrastructural). The needs in question should not be exclusively utilitarian, neglecting the fundamental research resulting with a **new knowledge**. Needless to say, the interests of the stakeholders (both those of the providing and the receiving end) are extremely important and must be taken into serious account. This is, understandably, so because if the interests of the stakeholders are not met, the strategy should be like a hollow shell or an empty picture frame (Fig. 2) which looks nice but has no purpose. Such a strategy may serve as an adornment of the society rather than a true road-map for action.

When the cycle of activities in *preparing* the strategy is completed, the next step consists of *implementation* of the strategy. Only after the implementation the possible shortcomings would become apparent and the strategy could be improved (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. If there is no picture in it, the beauty of the frame is pointless

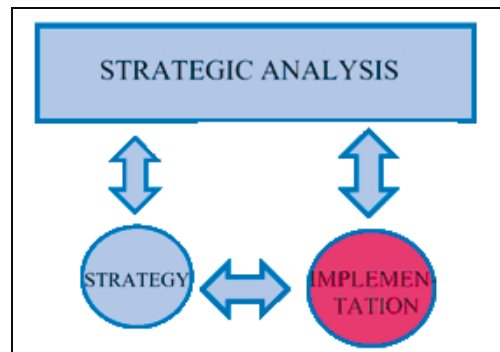


Fig. 3. Schematic representation of the steps needed to come to the preparation and implementation of the strategy

¹ The opinions contained in the article are of the author alone and have not been approved or endorsed in any way by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts as such.

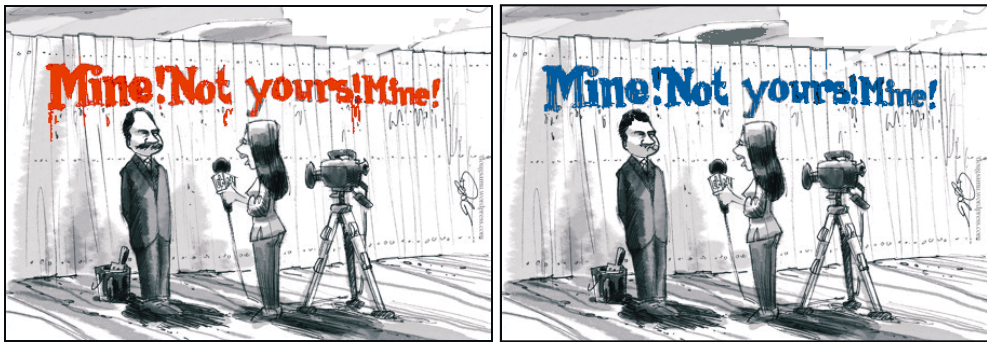


Fig. 4. The “mine, not yours” attitude can not lead to progress

If the national strategies are to be sustainable, they should be truly **national** rather than **political** in nature and should not be abandoned on every change of the political elite in power and replaced by a new set of strategies (Fig. 4).

Not only such an attitude is utterly counterproductive, but could even result with partisan-based retributions with „our” players be rewarded and „theirs” punished irrespective of the merits (or lack of such) of the former and/or the latter. In extreme cases this could even lead to purges of the „others”².



Fig. 5. The famous “Council of Elders” (chaired by former Archbishop Desmond Tutu) used here as a paradigm

„council of elders” (Fig. 5) which would then attract other, **able**, collaborators. Again, the collaborators should be selected on the basis of their merits, not of their political affiliations.

The pivotal position of the academies in the preparation of national strategies has not only advantages but also disadvantages. Of these the first to be men-

² The author was extremely surprised to learn that one of the European academies was, on the change of the political system in the country, completely dissolved (because it was „heavily contaminated”) and then reestablished.

tioned is the relatively high age of many academicians. Surely, the age itself must not be taken as a disadvantage and the discrimination on the basis of age (*ageism*) should not be present in any discourse or action, but the age is not an easily dismissable factor. The academicians may be out of touch with the present time and tendencies, and even, so to say, flying in the clouds (Fig. 6). However, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages (at least according to this author's opinion if not to that of eager youngsters who consider anyone older than them as a sort of fossil).



Fig. 6. Due to their age, the academicians may “fly in the clouds”

Another field in which national strategy is needed is the **education**, the higher one being of paramount importance for the academies. Whereas the position and the internal mechanisms of the academies may be difficult to change, the higher education is in almost constant change, the so-called *Bologna process* being the newest trend.

The author does not want to judge the merits and shortcomings of the Bologna process but is presently concerned with the need for a strategy for obtaining an optimal number and spatial distribution of the institutions of higher education. His firm belief is that in a relatively small and not very developed country, the „mushrooming” of universities and faculties (both public and private) can not go on unabated but should be based on a sound strategy. Whereas the private universities may be mainly interested in the lucrative side of the „business” and to a much lesser degree in the quality of their „end products”, the public institutions of higher education should have the opposite order of interests.

To attain the goal of high quality, a legislative framework is needed (and must be *implemented*) but without a strategy such a framework may not be what the desired optimum really is. The academies should either take part of the preparation of a strategy for the development of the higher education or, at least, supervise the development and issue expert opinions³ for the activities in the field.

³ The majority of the members of the academies are former or active professors.

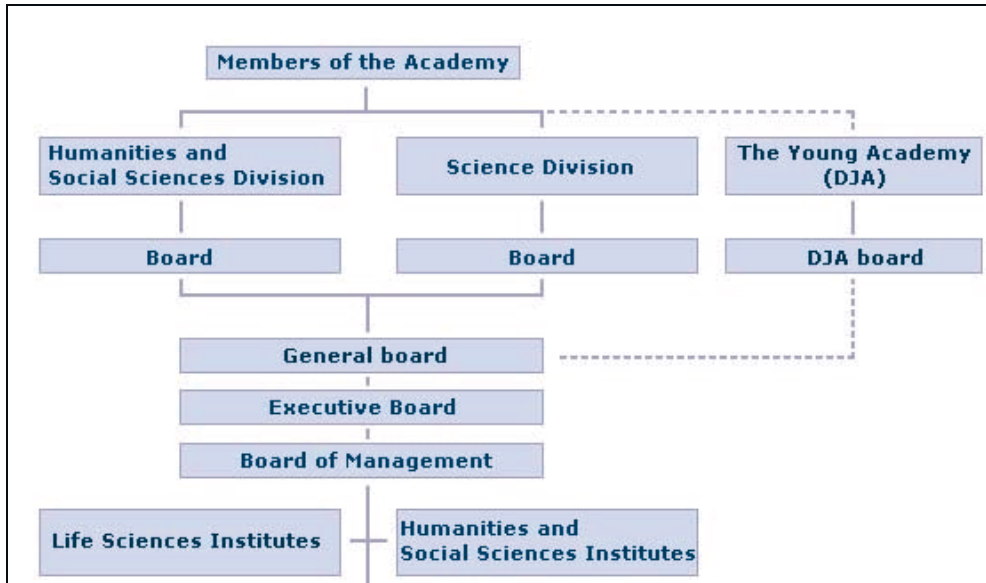


Fig. 7. The place of the Young Academy in the Royal Netherlands Academy and Sciences

Sure enough, the proclaimed goal of *higher institution (s) in every town* may sound reasonable and attractive to the relatively uneducated population, but its rush implementation (without a serious and non-partisan previous analysis of the real needs of both the individuals and their families, on the one hand, and of the society, on the other) is not likely to have positive results. This is so not only because the human and material resources of the society are not unlimited, but also because studying in Oxford is not comparable to studying in small towns even if the level of obtained knowledge is not fundamentally lower in the latter case. The high education, namely, has not only educational but also sociological value which must not be ignored. On the other hand, the proclaimed goal may be good for the perception and the approval rating of the authors of such a thesis.

The academies should feel obliged to have their own strategies as well, especially regarding the recruitment of young (er) scientists and artists into their ranks. This is necessary in order to *decrease* the average age of the academy members. In many academies the problem is solved by establishing (or keeping) a category of *corresponding members*, a description that, by the way, is not

reflecting the true status and duties of these members⁴. In the opinion of the author, a much better solution is to set up a unit, similar to that existing in the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Austrian Academy of Sciences and Leopoldina/Brandenburg Academy of Sciences. In the first case the unit is named **Young Academy** (Fig. 7) in the second – **Junge Kurie** and in the third – **Junge Academie**. The exact modalities of the functioning of such a unit may, of course, vary and be suited to the local needs. In fact, differences in the modalities exist in the three above-mentioned cases.

The author admits that he is a fervent promoter of the Young Academy idea in his own academy.

Acknowledgment. The figures in the text are downloaded from Internet and, in some cases, additionally edited. The author is indebted to the rightful owners of these pictures.

⁴ They are not **corresponding** with the academy but actively working within it.

