



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI TRENTO

2nd Case Study The University of Trento (Italy)

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“The Role of Universities in the ERA”

Bristol, 28 march 2003

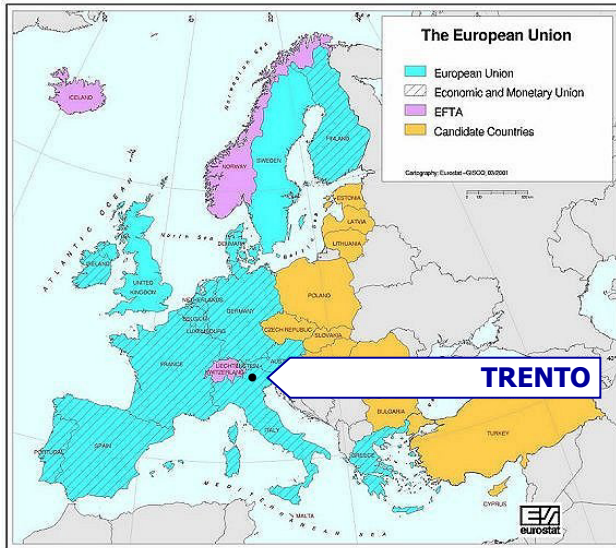
Structure of the presentation

- The University of Trento today
- The local, national and European opportunities and constraints
- The need for change
- The definition of new policies and strategies
- The actions and some results
- Open issues



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The University of Trento - location and historical clues



- **1962**
The Institute of Social Science is founded by local politicians

- **1972**
The Institute becomes a private University

- **1982**
The University becomes a **state University** with special autonomy



The University of Trento today - staff and students

Professors	452
Technical and Administrative staff	575
Total staff	1027
Students	14.952
PhD Students	354
Graduates (2002)	2124



The University of Trento today - structures

- 6** Faculties
- 13** Research Departments
- 1** Centre of excellence
- 2** Interdepartmental research centres
- 35** Research laboratories
- 8** Study centres
- 1** Linguistic centre
- 4** Libraries
- 5** University restaurants
- 1** Congress centre
- 2** Structures for students recreational activities
- 3** Sport centres
- 700** Accomodations



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The situation in the mid-nineties: opportunities and constraints

At local level

- Trento Province, with special autonomy from central Government
- a relevant local research system supported by local Government

At national level

- A low governmental and private investments in research and university education; a mismatch of demand and supply of research
- the Italian University Reform

At European level

- the rise of competition among territorial systems
- the Bologna process and the creation of EHRA



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The situation in the mid-nineties

Despite traditionally good performances, some critical aspects were progressively emerging in most of the Italian universities (including the University of Trento), mainly related to

- a too complex system of governance and unclear decision-making structure
- limited or absent culture of strategic planning
- scattered presence of evaluation culture
- scant reliable internal information management
- an administration system mainly oriented to the fulfilment of the procedures: a risk averse bureaucracy
- poor institutional relations with stakeholders (the university was still perceived as “external body” by the local community)

Trento: financial abundance allowed to avoid conflicts while making unnecessary to define priorities

The proposal by the Rector

In view of the foreseen increase in autonomy of the Italian universities that the Reform was introducing, and of the consequent rise of competition among universities, a need for transformation became evident.

The Rector's proposal to get ready for competition pointed to:

- the increase of the international stand of the University both in research and education
- the rise of the attention to institutional partners and to stakeholders' expectations
- the broadening of the financial portfolio to contrast the reduction of resources coming from the central government

The main concern was to offer elements to make acceptable and possible a more rational use of resources.

All this implied to find new ground in order to institutionalize a shared design.

The vision underlying the proposed transformation

In other words, to be able to respond positively to the new threats, a transformation was necessary:

FROM a University pervaded by negotiations driven by individual interests and solved in "person by person" relations

TO a University as a space for strategic planning on the bases of shared goals and interests (institutional negotiation and consensus)

FROM a University structure that mainly paid attention to the norms and procedures

TO a University structure goals-oriented

FROM a self-referential University

TO an accountable University

Fostering the internal cultural change

The **question** was how to create incentives to a wider cooperation in reaching well defined shared goals.

Inside Faculties and research Departments the idea of being "service-oriented" was scarcely present.

The relations with external entities were rarely expression of an institutional interest and commitment (either at Faculty or Departmental level), but remained mainly individually driven.

The allocation of resources among units followed no evident criteria.

The **proposal** has been:

- devolution of authority and decentralization of the decision making
- increased autonomy and increased responsibilities
- internal competition for resources based on:
 - quality evaluation as basic element for negotiations
 - ability to attract external funds from highly competitive contexts

Changing the culture inside the University

To support this process, actions and new instruments were needed.

The most demanding and forceful were the:

- introduction of a "supportive" evaluation system
- introduction of a new, goal oriented approach in administration
 - reorganization of the administrative structure with a clear definition of functions and responsibilities
 - linkage of the expansion of the administrative staff to goals
- introduction of a new analytical accounting system and a management control system
- definition of new regulations on intellectual property and code of conduct (ethic) to clarify the relationships with external partners

Change in the relations with the regional actors

At the same time, new ways were adopted to relate with the main **local actors**, namely

- the **political** provincial authorities (PAT) and local municipalities
- the local **cultural and social** institutions and local media
- the **local research institutions**
- the **economic** world, with locally:
 - was mainly tertiary
 - was productive mainly in agriculture and tourism
 - was almost entirely formed by SME
 - presented no industrial or innovative district while having great potential for such a development based on local research institutions (e.g. high-tech district)

The design of a shared development programme

This process led to the identification of common interests and to the consequent shared design of a development programme conveyed into:

- the long-term “Action Programme Agreement” signed with **local authorities** who granted fundings for priority actions in:
 - education: agreements on subjects and degree courses
 - research: joint development of new areas and joint access to international funding
 - internationalization processes of education and research
 - establishment of a new university campus
 - long-term building plan

The University demonstration to be committed and capable of reaching the expected results in respect of the agreements contributed to a positive change in the attitude from the local partners.

The design of a shared development programme

A similar cooperative approach was employed, not without difficulties, in the relations with the numerous **research institutions** operating in the region, which:

- used to mainly respond to the basic needs of modernization of the agricultural sector (e.g. Istituto Agrario S. Michele)
- while internationally renowned, failed to spread innovation, greatly due to scarcity of local suitable industries (e.g. ITC-irst)

The turning point was the realization of the unavoidable need to act in a systemic way to reach the critical mass needed to access international stand and fundings. The strengthening of the **local research system**, an explicit priority for the local government (>3% PIL), passed through the:

- access to international research networks
- creation of new international centres of excellence in the region
- funding of inter-institutions projects

The design of a shared development programme

The response of the University to the expectations of the **local economic world**, in view of framing an innovative district, led to the joint identification of new areas of development and the empowerment of already existing ones in:

- **education:** agreements on subjects and degree courses
e.g. mechatronics courses, financially supported by local industries;
training initiatives and life-long learning (also by distant learning)
e.g. apprenticeship programme in ICT sector; permanent education programmes in economics and management; teaching school;
- **research:** joint development of new areas and joint access to national and international funding, through networking and the creation of consortia e.g. Hydrogen Consortium (University & research Institutions & local Industries)
the creation of a Foundation to favour the exploitation of the results from University research (Intellectual Property Rights) and to foster technology transfer and the creation of spin-offs.

The situation today

The University of Trento responded in a rational way to national reforms and some outcomes of its strategic choices are well visible.

Some programmes have been realized:

- The introduction of a new accounting system for supporting a clear resources allocation and a good access to the VI FP
- A research evaluation system, as basic element for development and for a rational resource allocation
- Strong increase in resources attraction by research departments, based on co-financing rules and international networking
- Internationalization and increased potential for attraction of foreign students

The main areas of internal intervention coincided with the areas that, much later, were identified by CENSIS as relevant in carrying out its assessment aiming at a national ranking of Italian universities.

This fact explains the fast rise in that ranking of the University of Trento.

The main key indicators used to assess Universities:

- **Productivity**
- **Capacity of attraction**
- **Research quality**
- **Educational offer**
- **International relations**



Rank	2000	2001	2002
Engineering	5	4	1
Science	24	17	6
Economics	4	4	3
Sociology	1	1	1
Law	8	3	1
Arts and Philosophy	20	7	2

The situation today

The University of Trento has, at present, instruments and experience to cope with the European policy in education and research (the Bologna process and the creation of EHRA and ERA).

Needless to say, its innovation process is still under way.
And problems still need to be tackled and solved:

- the University of Trento has to complete its informal changes of the governance rules and stabilize it through a modification of its Statutes
- a culture of the quality assessment in all areas of university activities has to be stabilized
- access to external resources must be further increased and alliances with stakeholders must be strengthened

The documents

The annual strategic planning activity and the results of the commitment of all University actors are widely described in relevant documents:

- Guidelines for Budget
- Planning Document of the Rector on the occasion of the Budget
- Annual Rector's statement at the Opening of Academic Year
- Annual Report on Activity on the occasion of the final Balance
- Annual Report from the Internal Evaluation Unit

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