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K.B. Lozovskaya, A.S. Menshikov, E.S. Purgina[1]

"HORIZON OF THE FUTURE": REALITIES AND ASPIRATIONS OF TOP-RANKING BRICS UNIVERSITIES (ANALYSIS OF MISSION STATEMENTS)[2]

Educational systems are key actors in social modernization. In order to assess whether BRICS can become an alternative platform for new international collaboration, the authors investigate how the top universities in BRICS countries describe their national and international role. The authors focus on the mission statements which articulate the universities' goals and aspirations.
Keywords: *BRICS, higher education systems, top universities, world university rankings, mission statements.*

Introduction

Educational systems are fundamental institutions of modern societies, and their development played a crucial role in the process of social modernization. P. Wagner suggested analyzing social modernization by investigating historical experience of societies and the interpretations societies give to their specific experience [1]. These regional variations of modernity can no longer be analyzed in terms of approximation to the Western model (modernization as westernization), but have to be approached as a plurality of modernity. In this light, BRICS appears to have a potential of creating a new and rather novel variant of modernity, because it is not a regional association based on proximity, but an association of common interests and shared aspirations. In M. Khomyakov's view, BRICS can become an alternative model or rather a promise of an alternative to the current global inequalities, reproduced and reinforced by the global educational market, "ranking race" and North-South educational cooperation[3] [2].

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[1] **Авторы:** К.Б. Лозовская, А.С. Меньшиков, Е.С. Пургина.

Название статьи: «Горизонты будущего»: реалии и надежды высокорейтинговых университетов БРИКС (анализ миссий).

Аннотация. Образовательные системы являются ключевыми акторами социальной модернизации. С целью ответить на вопрос, могут ли страны БРИКС стать альтернативной платформой для новых форм международного сотрудничества на современном этапе модернизации, мы обратились к миссиям высокорейтинговых университетов БРИКС, в которых ими сформулированы их роль в национальном и международном образовательном пространстве, цели и устремления.

Ключевые слова: БРИКС, системы высшего образования, ведущие университеты, мировые рейтинги университетов, миссии.

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[3] Dominating model of the university interaction is the model of "vertical" collaboration of the North and South, in which Northern expertise and standards are exchanged for human (students) and material (funding) resources of the Southern nations [2. P. 340].

The notion of self-understanding developed by Wagner can be a very useful instrument in testing whether there is any tendency among BRICS universities to embark on a mission to design and offer an alternative to the current global educational market. In a more recent formulation, Wagner points out that "the collectivity that exercises its autonomy mobilizes problem-oriented reflexivity, and is capable of acting upon itself in a consciously self-altering way" [3. P. 7]. Such a collectivity can be of a different magnitude – a nation, a regional actor, but also a university which has to deal with the challenges of present global – neoliberal and neocolonial–injustices. The university has "two possible strategies here: the first one is an attempt to gain a proper share of the global educational market through active participation in the worldwide excellence race, while the second one is rather a quest for an alternative vision" [2. P. 335]. In order to assess the viability of the claim that BRICS can become an alternative platform for the global international collaboration and that BRICS can be both the voice and the beacon for the Global South, one has to investigate how the top higher education institutions in BRICS countries understand themselves and their values and, further, how they describe their role in the respective country, region, and on the globe. Therefore, in our analysis, we are going to focus on the mission statements and other similar documents which describe a university's goals, values, commitments and assess which of the two strategies described above prevail in the articulations of the self-understanding of the BRICS top universities.

National systems of higher education in BRICS

While some researchers point out differences among BRICS and doubt that any valid comparison can be made of this 'marketing artifice' [4], others highlight the general trends in BRICS and show that these countries to a considerable extent face similar challenges and have similar goals in higher education [5, 6]. In our view, it is these challenges and the way they are addressed that should be the main focus of scholarly analysis.

In the face of the growing demand for higher education and the continuing increase in student enrolment numbers, on the one hand, and the lack of resources to satisfy this demand, on the other, the governments in BRICS countries choose to 'invest more in national flagship institutions to make them engines for global competition' [7. P. 1]. This policy exacerbates the problem of social inequality all BRICS countries have because it strengthens the differentiation between 'mass' institutions of higher education, attended by the vast majority of students, and public 'elite' universities [8]. HE systems in BRICS are largely shaped and regulated by the state through various control mechanisms, targeting admissions, tuition fees, curriculum, examinations, which produces administrative and management problems as "internal governance tends to be highly bureaucratic and very often rather inefficient" [8. P. 3]. Most BRICS universities of China, Russia and Brazil introduce courses in English and incentivize researchers to publish more in English, the lingua franca of the global academic community, but have to "balance between striving to achieve global recognition, on the one hand, and sustaining a national and regional academic culture, on the other" [8. P. 50]. In the modern world, universities simultaneously belong to the global HE market and are rooted in their own societies and national HE systems [9. P. 14]. In the following sections of this article, we are going to look at identity narratives of the leading BRICS universities

to gain a better understanding of how they view their roles in addressing the above-described challenges in the national and international context.

Mission statements as public identity narratives and their audiences

Modern HEIs are expected to make their missions (existing in various formats such as mission statement or vision) publicly available: in most cases, they are published on universities' official websites. In this article, we are going to treat mission statements and other similar documents as universities' '*identity narratives'*, telling about the "reason why the institution exists within a society" [10; 11. P. 2]. Mission statements reflect "how organizations see themselves as well as how they want others to view them" [11. P. 2]. Seeber et al. [Ibid.] make a very important point: apart from the goals and means of achieving them, missions also point to (sometimes indirectly) the stakeholders or groups of stakeholders the university depends on in order to survive and whose demands it is expected to meet, which often reflects the actual priorities the university's leadership make in their policy- and decision-making. In the case of BRICS, the key stakeholders are governmental agencies (funders); industry (beneficiaries); students and parents (as users and customers); and the general public (opinion leaders, NGOs). Thus, instead of a single identity, most universities appear to have many identities oriented towards different stakeholders, which raises a question about how universities balance their 'multiple organizational identities' [12] and how this process is reflected in the narratives they publish on their websites.

Most universities' mission statements are 'either excessively vague or unrealistically aspirational or both' and use vague, abstract and general language [13. P. 457]. C.C. Morphew and M. Hartley believe that such vagueness is intentional as missions perform primarily the ritual or *legitimating function*, showing that the university understands 'the rules of the game' [13. P. 458]. This way, universities are trying to find niches to position themselves in the eyes of external stakeholders [14]. In addition, mission statements use vague phrasing to appeal to as many different stakeholders as possible so that stakeholders could 'infer differing directives' [15. P. 12].

The second function of mission statements – that of *differentiation* – stands in opposition to the first: many HEIs strive to "carve out the 'competitive' position of the organization in the educational market" [16. P. 101]. To balance these two goals, HEIs devise missions that would combine indications of their similarity and uniqueness or sameness and difference at the same time [14].

Content and discourse analysis of top BRICS universities' mission statements

We used the QS BRICS University Ranking to select universities for our sample. For each BRICS country, we chose ten universities that occupied top positions in the ranking as of August 2019. Thus, each national subgroup of universities in the sample comprises ten institutions (Table 1).

Mission statements were collected from the universities' official websites. We started from the main page, 'About Us' and/or 'General Information' sections, and, if we failed to find the texts this way, we used the search function on the website by entering the key terms such as 'mission', 'values', and so on. If no results were found, we assumed that the university did not have a publicly available mission at

the time when the analysis was conducted (in this case the mission was marked as 'unavailable' for this university). We assumed that the mission statements of Brazilian, Chinese and Russian universities in the native language were oriented towards the domestic audiences, while the mission statements in English were intended for international audiences. Thus, when possible, we also compared the content of the universities' mission statements in the native language with their English versions: this applied to Brazilian, Chinese and Russian universities. For Indian and South African universities, we used only the English version since in both countries English is used in official discourse and as a language of instruction. At the stage of content analysis, the authors coded the text independently and then discussed their findings, thus ensuring that the coding scheme should be applied consistently to the full sample. The content analysis was supplemented with discourse analysis as in certain cases we found significant differences in the meanings of specific concepts (e.g., 'excellence').

Table 1. **Top universities in the QS BRICS University Ranking (as of August 2019)***

Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
Universidade de São Paulo (USP) (14)	Lomonosov State University (MSU) (6)	Indian State University of Bombay (IITB) (8)	Tsinghua University (THU) (1)	University of Cape Town (UCT) (22)
Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp) (16)	Saint Petersburg State University (SPbU) (11)	Indian Institute of Science (IISc) (10)	Peking University (PKU) (2)	University of Witwatersrand (Wits) (40)
Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP) (29)	Novosibirsk State University (NSU) (12)	Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM) (17)	Fudan University (FDU) (3)	University of Pretoria (UP) (45)
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) (32)	Tomsk State University (TSU) (19)	Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IITD) (18)	University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) (4)	Stellenbosch University (SU) (51)
Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) (43)	Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology (MIPT) (21)	Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur (IIT-KGP) (23)	Zhejiang University (ZJU) (5)	University of Johannesburg (UJ) (61)
Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP) (49)	National Research Nuclear University (MEPhI) (30)	Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK) (25)	Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) (7)	University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN) (85)
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) (53)	Bauman Moscow State Technical University (BMSTU) (33)	University of Hyderabad (UoH) (36)	Nanjing University (NU) (9)	Rhodes University (ROSS) (126)
Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP) (57)	National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) (37)	University of Delhi (DU) (42)	Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) (13)	University of the Western Cape (UWC) (139)
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande Do Sul (UFRGS) (59)	National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU) (39)	Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee (IITR) (47)	Wuhan University (WHU) (15)	North-West University (NWU) (170)
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) (66)	Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) (44)	Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IITG) (48)	Harbin Institute of Technology (HIT) (20)	University of the Free State (UFS) (180)

*Source: compiled on the basis of QS BRICS University Rankings 2019; each university's position in the ranking is shown in parentheses.

To analyze mission statements and other similar documents, we relied on the methodology described in [12] and in [17]. Following these studies, we identified seven main clusters of values: excellence / quality / efficiency, social justice/diversity, third mission, academic orientation, internationalization / global impact, evaluation, and history. The category 'history' was added because our preliminary analysis had shown that universities often tend to refer to history and / or traditions in their mission statements or other kinds of identity narratives (see Table 2 for clusters and their descriptions).

Table 2. **Clusters of themes used for content analysis**

	Cluster	Description
1	Excellence / quality / efficiency	High-quality education services and research, reputation, status, university rankings, world-class universities
2	Social justice / diversity	Inclusivity, equal access to HE and equity, lifelong learning
3	Third mission / social efficiency	Technology and innovation transfer, economic impact, serving local, regional and state economies, production of human capital for the country's economy, sustainability
4	Academic orientation	Academic freedom, collegiality, trust and respect
5	Internationalization / global impact	Networking, international partnerships and collaborations, international visibility, academic mobility, openness
6	Evaluation	Transparency, accountability
7	History	Continuity, traditions, year of foundation, milestone dates, founding documents, distinguished alumni and faculty members

If significant differences in the native-language and English-language versions of mission statements were found (as was the case of Chinese universities), these were discussed separately. First, the universities' missions were considered within their national subgroups, and then comparisons were drawn between the subgroups.

Brazilian universities

The subgroup of Brazilian universities includes two private Catholic universities – PUC-Rio and PUC-SP, the rest of the universities are public.

Most universities emphasized their adherence to the values of three clusters: third mission/outreach (9 universities), excellence (7), and history (8). These were followed by internationalization/global impact and social justice/diversity (four each). Relatively few mission statements displayed values from the categories 'Academic Orientation' (3) and 'Evaluation' (1).

Some differences between the content in Portuguese and in English were detected. No English pages for PUC-SP and UFRJ were found. The English version of UFMG's website offers only the general 'Presentation' page, while the Portuguese version also includes a mission statement. In the English version of UNIFESP's website ('For Foreign Visitors'), 'Welcome from the Rector' highlights openness to the world and willingness to internationalize. The Portuguese version of PUC-Rio's 'Message from the President/Rector' included five key values while the English version, just four (the omitted value was 'excellence').

Brazilian universities tend to use 'excellence' in its general meaning of outstanding quality, although in some missions this concept acquires additional meanings. UFSC, for example, connects 'excellence' with social justice and diversity: UFSC envisions to become a 'university of excellence and inclusion'; 'centre of academic excellence at regional, national and international levels, contributing to

the development of a just and democratic society'. Similarly, Unicamp declares its ambition to become 'a national and international model for public, multi-campus universities and for excellence in education, in research and in public outreach'.

Brazilian HEIs often put emphasis on the 'third mission' ('extension' or 'outreach') but interpret it as integration of academia and community rather than the university's contribution to the country's economic prosperity through R&D (e.g., 'integration between academic and community life' (PUC-Rio); 'interaction between academic knowledge and society as an important instrument of social transformation' (UNIFESP)).

A typical feature shared by the vast majority of the identity narratives is that they include quite a lot of 'facts and figures', such as references to their history and milestone events; size; number of students, graduates, and international partnerships; ranking positions, famous alumni, etc.

One of the popular strategies is to cite official documents and governmental agencies to confirm the universities' legitimacy and emphasize the support they receive from the government (e.g., UFSC, UNIFESP, PUC-Rio). In some cases, universities use the results of quality assurance and quality assessment procedures to certify their high level of teaching and research (UFMG).

Only one university–UFSC–included its results in global rankings into its identity narrative.

Russian universities

All Russian universities in the sample are public. Six universities in the sample participate in the '5-100' academic excellence project sponsored by the Russian government. No mission or similar documents were found on the MSU website.

All the texts emphasized the third mission (9), associated primarily with the support the universities provide to knowledge-intensive industries through innovation, R&D, and training of human resources. Missions state the intention 'to train the intellectual elite for science, education, knowledge-intensive production, and business' (NSU), 'to enhance the country's competitiveness… through training of engineering elite' (TPU), to provide 'advanced training of the intellectual leaders of society' (TSU), and so on.

Seven missions referred to the universities' history; six highlighted values from the category 'Internationalization/Global Impact'. Two universities asserted values from the category 'Academic Orientation' (HSE, TPU) and two universities, values from the category 'Evaluation' (HSE, SPbU). Only the HSE elaborates on these values and it is also the only university that mentions social diversity and justice values in its identity narrative.

Certain differences are found between the Russian and English versions of missions: for instance, MEPhI and MGIMO have general information or Rector's greeting in the Russian version but provide proper mission statements only on their English pages. Interestingly, the English version of the 'TPU Today' web-page contains sections 'University Green Policy' and 'The History of Women at TPU', absent in the Russian version. This way the university supposedly tries to enhance its appeal to external (possibly Western) audiences, assuming that Russian audiences are not that interested in the 'green' agenda or women's movement.

Although some universities include spatial markers in their narratives, their regional or national identity is not accentuated, and, generally, the universities make no mention of their peculiar 'Russianness'.

Russian HEIs frequently refer to official documents which either established them or granted them a special status (e.g., federal laws (SPbU), ministerial and presidential decrees (TSU, MIPT, BMSTU)).

Values from the category 'Excellence / Quality / Efficiency' occupy a prominent position in Russian universities' value systems. The majority of the universities (7) make heavy use of figures, pointing to their positions in national, regional and international rankings (either in their mission statements or in sections 'Facts and Figures' or 'University in Rankings'), the number of programs, famous alumni (Nobel laureates) and graduates, milestone dates and events (e.g., BMSTU Rector's greeting).

A typical rhetorical strategy in this subgroup is to show openness and internationalization efforts by pointing to HEIs' connections with Western partners (e.g., MEPhI). Some universities emphasize their distinction by including references to unique atmosphere and traditions in their narratives ('the unique atmosphere of 'bauman life' with its traditions and enthusiasm" (BMSTU)).

Indian universities

All universities in this subgroup are public. Apart from the DU and UoH, all HEIs belong to the group of Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), enjoying the status of institutes of national importance established by the Institutes of Technology Act (1961). No mission statement or similar documents were found on the IITK website.

The 'third mission' appears to be of primary importance to the Indian HEIs (7): it is given unquestionable priority in the texts, both in terms of the frequency of mentions and the amount of text, especially compared with the lack of focus given to other themes, such as social justice or academic orientation.

Excellence (5) and global impact (3) are usually associated with the 'third mission', thereby creating an impression that they are seen as constituent elements of the third mission as the universities' primary purpose (e.g., "to be a leading global technology university that provides transformative education to create leaders and innovators" (IITB)).

The Indian HEIs' understanding of the term 'excellence' is linked to their success in gaining reputation and securing high positions in rankings (e.g., UoB intends to "be an internationally acclaimed University, recognized for excellence in teaching, research and outreach"). Nevertheless, in some cases the meaning of this term is made vague by the context or lack thereof (e.g., "appreciation of intellectual excellence and creativity" (IITD); "strive to be relevant and excellent" (IITM)).

In their identity narratives, universities tend to make an extensive use of various official documents (parliamentary decree (IITB), governmental ordinance (IITR), the IIT act and IIT Statutes, Science Policy Resolution, and Technology Policy Statement (IITM)).

Comparatively few missions contained elements corresponding to such categories as 'Academic Orientation', 'Evaluation' and 'History' (3 for each category) and to 'Social Justice' (2).

Chinese universities

All Chinese universities in our sample are public. Eight universities are members of the C9 League, comprising elite research institutions supported by the government.

Most of the missions focus on such themes as excellence, reputation and international recognition (10), history and traditions (9), internationalization (9), and third mission (10). Only two missions referred to values from the category 'Academic Orientation' (FDU, PKU). Academic orientation values are displayed only by the English version of PKU's mission while in the Chinese version any references to these values were omitted. None of the universities' missions made any mention of the values from the categories 'Evaluation' and 'Social Justice'.

English web-pages may contain the rector's greeting, explicitly addressed to prospective international students and stating the institution's intention to "build World-class university rooted in China" (e.g., SYSU, THU).

Even visually, the difference between the Chinese and English versions of university websites is obvious: Chinese versions feature red colour, socialist emblems and symbols, while English versions have more neutral colours (blue, purple or violet) and are devoid of socialist symbols, featuring instead images of international students representing the university's openness to the world. Differences are found on the textual level as well: the vast majority of Chinese versions of the mission statements contain allusions to and sometimes direct quotes from Xi Jinping's speeches (e.g., NU). In some cases, the Communist Party of China and the government are mentioned as the guiding force behind the university's progress (WHU).

A peculiar feature shared by most texts, both Chinese and English, is the wide use of figures of speech and word play, especially metaphors: metaphors of gardening and growth (university as a site of harmony with nature; university as a garden of one hundred flowers; education as cultivation of talents (THU)); metaphors of height (climbing mountain peaks as metaphor of innovation, progress and achievement (ZJU, HIT)); metaphors of factory production (steel forging as 'forging' of character (HIT)); and metaphors of light (e.g., FDU invokes a creative play on the characters constituting its name: *fu* 'return' and *dan* 'dawn' and quotes from the ancient text *Shangshu*: "Brilliant are the sunshine and moonlight, again the morning radiance returns at dawn").

The theme of traditions and history is heavily emphasized in its connection with the theme of innovation and technical progress through the use of stylistically marked idioms (WHU) and hieroglyphs, allusions to ancient texts, classical stories, and sayings. The traditional Chinese culture is presented as the foundation or fertile ground for progress and growth of which universities are the agents. Longevity of universities and their proclaimed adherence to traditions may enhance their legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the key publics, strengthening their prestige and reputation (SJTU).

Tsinghua University introduces the concept of 'Tsinghua man' in the Chinese version of the rector's address (omitted in the English version) to refer to a student, alumnus, faculty or staff member or anybody else who has imbibed the university's culture and ideology, has gained experience and confidence within its walls and has thus become 'rooted' in the university.

South African universities

All universities in this subgroup are public. They all have detailed 'About Us' sections on their websites, including diverse information on their history, mission, values, goals, vision, and strategic plans. The missions themselves, however,

mostly use general language and sound quite abstract; no easily-measured outcomes and deliverables are usually mentioned.

Most South African HEIs emphasize their commitment to ensuring social justice, especially racial, diversity and equality in the country and Africa in general (9) (e.g., "to acknowledge and be sensitive to the problems created by the legacy of apartheid"(ROSS). They also demonstrate a focus on African identity and local / regional context as well as the intention to promote the development of the region in partnership with other African universities and states (e.g., UJ describes itself as "an Afropolitan international university with an identity of inclusion", "alive down to its African roots" and "anchored in Africa").

The majority of universities (6) also refer to their history. Elements from such categories as 'Internationalization', 'Academic Orientation' and 'Evaluation' can be found in four missions each.

South African HEIs can be described as 'student-centred': their missions describe 'unique campus atmosphere' and 'transformative student experience' (SU); promise individual approach: "as a small University with dedicated and committed staff, we are able to offer that personal touch that may make a difference in your life" (ROSS).

While the majority of South African HEIs mention excellence and their intention to become global leaders (8), they do not provide any specific data (e.g., NWU indicates as its 'dream' "to be an internationally recognized university in Africa"), which makes such statements sound more like idealistic visions than based on fact and grounded in reality. The same can be said about internationalization, mentioned in four missions but never elaborated upon.

South African universities mostly use the term 'excellence' in its basic and most general meaning of outstanding performance and extraordinary quality [ENQA Report 'The Concept of Excellence in Higher Education', 2014]. 'Excellence' covers not only research, but other dimensions such as teaching / learning or community engagement or can be an all-encompassing notion ('academic / intellectual excellence') (e.g., 'superior academic excellence' (NWU), 'inspiring excellence' (UFS's slogan), 'aspiring to academic excellence' (UCT)). Very few universities associate 'excellence' with rankings and international reputation (SU refers to international rankings THE and QS and claims to be 'recognized internationally as an academic institution of excellence'). Unlike universities in other subgroups, South African HEIs do not often cite official documents.

Conclusion

Most BRICS universities in our sample are public (except for two Brazilian universities), which means that their key stakeholders should be the government and the national public as universities need to legitimize their existence primarily in the eyes of funding authorities [12]. The third significant stakeholder group comprises prospective students and their families, both national and international. This latter group is important as a way to move up the world rankings. Prospective students and their families are often explicitly targeted by the universities' missions and other similar texts, in particular rector's addresses, by highlighting life-changing student experiences, the benefits of belonging to the unique and exciting university culture (e.g., becoming a 'Tsingjua man' or enjoying 'bauman life'), and high-quality services for better career opportunities. The wider public and govern-

ment are usually addressed more implicitly, by referring to social justice and equality, the third mission of universities, documents certifying the university's official status or change thereof, ranking positions, quoting from or referring to the speeches of national leaders, and showing its connection with the national policies and the government's decisions. Thus, for most universities, institutional pressures overweigh competitive pressures, and, therefore, the legitimating function dominates all the narratives (as opposed to the function of differentiation). The pursuit of sameness in BRICS universities' identity narratives prevails over the pursuit of uniqueness. In other words, the main purpose of the mission statements is for universities to be able to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the national audiences, which means that within each subgroup, HEIs tend to use more or less similar rhetorical strategies and language.

In contrast to Brazilian, Russian and Indian HEIs, universities of China and South Africa make a point of consistently connecting their institutional identities with the national identity (or, in the case of South Africa, regional identity). Chinese HEIs pursue the government-set goal of creating world-class universities 'with Chinese characteristics' [18. P. 133].

There is variation in how detailed and precise or, on the contrary, general and abstract universities' missions are. In this respect, Russian and Indian HEIs provide most detailed information, while SA universities' missions are the most vague and general. This may be explained by prioritization of different stakeholder groups. We can suppose that Russian and Indian universities appeal to institutions rather than people by pointing to specific performance indicators while their SA counterparts try to expand the range of target audiences as much as possible.

Mission statements meant for national and international audiences (Brazilian, Chinese, and Russian universities) feature considerable differences in the content, style and format in the English-language and national-language versions. The most striking differences are found in the narratives of Chinese and Russian HEIs, which strive to create a more 'open' image for international audiences, for example, by excluding the ideological component (China) or by trying to meet the expectations of Western publics (expressing commitment to environmental protection and other progressive causes).

'Excellence' is a popular concept used in most mission statements in all subgroups. Initially we considered 'excellence' to be associated primarily with the high quality of teaching and research as the basis of each country's competitive advantage on the HE market and in rankings (then 'excellence' is closer in meaning to the way it is used in the business discourse–the qualities that allow a company to remain competitive and win its share of the market). Later we discovered, however, that HEIs do not necessarily link 'excellence' to commercial success. Instead, they may point to the university's contribution to social justice and diversity ('extension' and 'outreach') in the country and/or in the region (this approach is characteristic of Brazilian and South African HEIs). The term 'excellence' in the meaning linked to competitiveness, reputation and rankings is most often used by Russian universities, which may be explained by the fact that, when translated from English into Russian (*prevoskhodstvo*), this word emphasizes gaining a competitive advantage over others, excluding other meanings such as social justice and outreach). Unsurprisingly, the 5–100 Project aimed at improving Russian universities' competitiveness is translated into English as 'Russian Academic Excellence

Project'. To some extent, this approach is shared by Indian and Chinese HEIs: the former tend to link 'excellence' to their 'third mission', that is, training 'leaders and innovators' for the country's economy, while the latter with the contribution universities make to enhancing the country's overall socio-economic prosperity.

South African universities demonstrate a distinctly student-oriented approach, unlike their Indian, Russian and Chinese counterparts, which accentuate the universities' role in achieving the pragmatic goals set by the governments of their respective countries. South African universities are more oriented towards addressing individual needs of students and providing conditions for their individual success in life. They are also more emphatically concerned with the issues of past and present social injustices and ways of overcoming them.

Although quite a number of universities in their missions set forth their plans to internationalize and join the global academic community, none of them specifically mentions cooperation within the BRICS bloc, which means that it is too early to place high hopes on BRICS in higher education as an emergent common alternative platform for South-South cooperation.

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Ksenya B. Lozovskaya, Ural Federal University (Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation).
E-mail: ksenia.lozovskaya@urfu.ru
Andrey S. Menshikov, Ural Federal University (Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation).
E-mail: andreimenchikov@gmail.com
Ekaterina S. Purgina, Ural Federal University (Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation).
E-mail: kathy13@yandex.ru

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"HORIZON OF THE FUTURE": REALITIES AND ASPIRATIONS OF TOP-RANKING BRICS UNIVERSITIES (ANALYSIS OF MISSION STATEMENTS)

Keywords: BRICS; higher education systems; top universities; world university rankings; mission statements.

Educational systems are key actors in social modernization. In order to assess whether BRICS can become an alternative platform for new international collaboration, the authors investigate how the top universities in BRICS countries describe their national and international role, goals and aspirations in their mission statements and other identity narratives. These texts reflect how higher education institutions (HEIs) see themselves and how they want the major stakeholders to see them. Thus, the universities' mission statements help to legitimate their activities to stakeholders and to differentiate their identity in the global educational market. For the sample, the authors selected 10 universities for each BRICS country that occupied top positions in the QS BRICS University Ranking in 2019. Mission statements and similar documents were collected from the universities' official websites. In the content-analysis, the authors relied on the methodological approaches proposed by C.C. Morphew et al. (2016) and J. Mampaey (2018). Following these studies, the authors identified 7 clusters of values: excellence, social justice, third mission, academic orientation, internationalization, evaluation, and history. Content-analysis was supplemented by discourse analysis, which included texts in the native languages and in English (for Chinese, Russian and Brazilian universities). Most BRICS HEIs in the sample are public and their key stakeholders are the government and the national public. The third major stakeholder is prospective students and their families, both national and international. This group is usually explicitly targeted through promises of unique campus experience, individual approach and career opportunities, while the government and the public are targeted more implicitly, by referring to social justice and equality, the third mission of universities, etc. For most HEIs, institutional pressures overweigh competitive pressures and, therefore, the legitimating function dominates all the narratives (as opposed to the function of differentiation). In other words, the main purpose of the mission statements is for universities to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the national audiences; therefore, in each subgroup, HEIs tend to use similar rhetorical strategies and language. Although many universities in their missions set forth their plans to internationalize and join the global academic community, none of them specifically mentions cooperation within the BRICS bloc, which means that it is too early to place high hopes on BRICS in higher education as an emergent common alternative platform for South-South cooperation.