BKC Strategy

Introduction

In this document we do not set out a strategic plan (SP) in the strictest sense of the term for the BKC Campus of International Excellence (CEI). We consider that confident planning of an institution’s future, and of actions required in relation to resources and aims, requires a level of certainty that we do not have. Therefore, it would not be particularly useful to draw up a strategic plan following the sequence generally adopted for standard SPs. Instead, we have sought an alternative approach within the logic of SPs to create a useful guide, or rather a road map, for decision-making. Put another way, we set out a series of considerations to be taken into account when a document is needed to guide future decisions.

In preparing this document, we did not conduct a collaborative search for a single mission and vision, nor did we carry out a classic SWOT analysis according to the standard method or propose priority lines of action drawn from SWOT results, and we did not draw from this process a series of objectives, actions and indicators that would enable us to propose a flawless system of governance, assessment and internal control and correction. These tasks are better suited to an external consultant commissioned to draw up a SP, who would undertake the work without going into the governance logic of the system or the individual universities, or the organizational designs and culture of the partners. It is our view, however, that the responsibility a Campus of International Excellence is to go beyond the mere routine while remaining within the bounds of possibility. Thus, this analysis aims to present a realistic approach to the task, resulting from the deliberations of agents entrusted by the partner universities with the considerable responsibility of managing a shared CEI and designing its future.

Although we have not drawn up a standard SP, all of the elements are present in our work, which has been organized in accordance with a logic that gives due consideration to contextual uncertainties, the various and changeable regulatory frameworks that govern the actions of CEIs, and the limitations that would make a standard SP more of an academic exercise than a realistic one. Our proposal is built on the exercise of rigorous strategic design principles, in which we adapted the usual procedures to the reality of a Campus that merits its designation of excellence, a Campus with the capacity to develop, a Campus that is viable and works towards the objective of long-term alliance and integration as far as is reasonably possible, reflecting the aims of the participating institutions.

Characteristics of the BKC as a campus

a) The BKC is the result of an initiative that brings together “parts” of two universities – the UB and the UPC – that complement one another and whose alliance has a clear academic rationale. The strategic aggregation of the “parts” of the UB and the UPC was in existence long before the CEI call for proposals, which supports our claim that the BKC is a demonstrable reality.

b) As a Campus of International Excellence, the BKC also meets the definition of “campus” in terms of its physical space. With a few minor exceptions (for logical reasons), the BKC is in an easily identifiable location where students, lecturers, non-teaching staff, service providers, and other users and visitors can move around easily without the need for a vehicle, as the distances are not great. In fact, someone with no connection to either of the BKC universities would find it difficult to discern which of the institutions a particular building belongs to on the strength of its location. Furthermore, groups in the university communities use some of the services, such as catering, libraries and study rooms, on the basis of which are nearest or most convenient, regardless of whether they belong to the UB or the UPC.

c) In the academic area, the teaching, research and knowledge transfer indicators for BKC activity are comparable to those of its European counterparts and justify the “excellence” classification. The “parts” of the alliance have teaching, research and knowledge transfer capacities that would place the partnership at the top of major rankings.

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1 In fact, we have outlined three scenarios over time that define a road map with a strategic focus.

2 A useful document for this task is the initial BKC proposal.

3 Without overlooking business models applied to university development.

4 The Diagonal Knowledge Gateway Campus was formed before the BKC.
d) In terms of voluntary cooperation, many researchers from the two universities worked together before the formation of the BKC, almost to the same degree as with lecturers in their own university’s faculties, departments, schools and research groups.5

Conditions and constraints

1) The whole and the parts. It was stated above that the BKC comprises two parts: one belonging to the UB and the other to the UPC. However, the nature of these parts has not been explained. We have stressed the cooperation between individual elements of the two universities, which was in place even before the creation of the BKC as a CEI. Nevertheless, to plan effectively, it is necessary to analyse which elements can be shared and which cannot. We must also evaluate the constraints placed on the alliance and on the management of the CEI in general, given that many of the services offered by each of the partners are designed for the whole of the respective university community. Other lesser (but equally important) constraints include the fact that the Rector’s Office and many of the central services of the UPC are housed within the BKC area, and that in reference to the physical area occupied by the BKC, the UPC distinguishes between its own North Campus and South Campus, and provides specific services for each one, which leads to a general reflection on organizational design.

2) Organizational designs of the two universities. Another major constraint derives from differences in the underlying logics of the partner universities’ organizational designs. The main difference lies in the cross-disciplinary nature of the departments. The UB adopts a more cross-cutting approach to the actions within each faculty or branch of knowledge (economics and business with law, for example), whereas the UPC organizes its departments in cross-disciplinary areas across all schools and courses of study (with some exceptions). The clearest example of this is the UPC’s Department of Management, which is present in almost all schools and faculties. Both the UPC and the UB have central services, with broadly similar degrees of decentralization. However, the decentralization of some services is greater at one university than the other; for example, since its creation (again, with a few exceptions), the UPC’s physical spaces have been managed relatively independently of individual Deans or Directors. In contrast, the management of the UB’s physical spaces is more decentralized, and is carried out by those in charge of the faculties. Therefore, organizational designs, which both influence and reflect internal governance structures, are important and should be taken into account in an alliance strategy. A sound CEI strategy requires an awareness and understanding of differences in the rationale on which academic structures and services are based, to prevent the pursuit of conflicting goals and the generation of unmanageable situations. This approach leads to a reflection on services.

3) Services. The university’s services can be classified in many ways. All universities provide numerous services for a wide range of needs. Examples include functional services for the entire university that cannot be outsourced, such as those related to staff, finances and assets; services designed for the entire university that can be outsourced, such as security; services for teaching staff related to their functions, such as third cycle and document services (which can be shared with students); student services to reinforce teaching activity, such as libraries, international exchanges and the Institute of Education Sciences (shared with the teaching staff); valorization services to create products, such as those related to patents, spin-offs and knowledge transfer; services for students and alumni that contribute to the university’s commitment to society: work placements, job market integration, etc. Clearly, a campus like the BKC, which pursues coherent goals and generates excellence in its outcomes, cannot adopt a strategy for services that is completely independent of each university’s individual strategy and does not reflect the organizational designs of many services it encompasses. In most cases, for obvious technical and financial reasons, services cannot be shared and cannot be organized in such a way that those

5 We have used the term “voluntary” here to indicate that, although cooperation between the lecturers of the two universities existed before the formation of the BKC (at a level similar to that found between lecturers at the same university), it has increased as a result of the BKC management team’s work.
elements of the partner universities not within the BKC framework are excluded⁶. The application of organizational and functional design criteria to the analysis of services in the framework of BKC strategy is no easy task: each service must be classified and its capacity analysed in relation to the stated aims of the BKC.

4) **The objectives and strategies of each university** and of their different components in the organizational design. One of the clear difficulties in designing a strategy for the BKC is finding a way to fit it around each university’s formal (and sometimes informal) strategies. This is a very important issue. Nevertheless, in practice, in the early stages of building of the BKC it is also important to identify the formal and informal strategies of the various components of the Campus. Faculties and university schools have coherently devised and recently implemented strategies, as do many services (and, in this case, many of the services that fall within the scope of this analysis have been designed for the entire university community rather than a single of it).

In addition, in the area of research and knowledge transfer, research groups (some of which even have independent fiscal status) are the most important structural component quantitatively speaking, and each one has its own (generally informal) strategies aligned with its specific interests. Therefore, all of these “pieces” should be taken into account in defining an overall strategy. In addition to the difficulties described here, each university has its own independent CEI: the UB has the HUBc health sciences campus, and the UPC has the Energy Campus. How two CEIs can be managed alongside one another by the same institution is a matter that we have not addressed here, although it should not be overlooked.

5) **The instruments.** Thus far we have discussed the characteristics of the BKC as parts of two different universities and the way in which the alliance must be analysed. In defining a strategy, it is also necessary to consider which are the key conceptual instruments that should be used. Cooperation is a basic requirement of complementarity, thus a study of complementarity could be one basis for the consideration of strategy. We could also use the concepts of alliance and integration or coordination (in fact, the relative intensity of each concept is what marks the three stages of the proposed road map). Another factor that contributes to the design process is the influence of economies of scale and/or critical dimensions. When this concept was integrated, we discovered a series of determining factors that provided a useful means of defining a general strategy. To help to understand which of these factors are relevant and their fundamental role in our methodological approach, we offer two illustrative examples: postgraduate studies and services.

a) In the area of teaching, some of the degrees offered by the two universities in the BKC are similar, and joint master’s degrees are offered in some fields. Furthermore, many subjects in different degrees (including chemistry, statistics and business organization) have similar or identical names and contents. This is particularly true in basic disciplines. In our analysis of cooperation, complementarity and critical dimensions, we found that the logic of master’s degree configuration could be used to design an alliance or even an integration strategy. For example, the motivations for the proposal and approval of master’s degrees vary: in general, international master’s degrees are the result of the specialization and field-specific excellence of a particular research group, in which case the degree of specialization leaves little room margin for collaboration, except in a few subjects; in other cases, the complementarity between research groups at the UB and the UPC could aid the alliance, such as master’s degrees that are designed to add professional skills to the graduate profile of specific bachelor’s degrees, but which cover different fields and could therefore be shared across various knowledge areas. The clearest example of this situation is a master’s degree with contents similar to those of a standard MBA that has been adapted to an engineering or scientific discipline. Such a degree could be offered by business management departments. Thus, one way to enhance academic design in the area of postgraduate study is through complementarity, diversity and specialization. When we applied this rationale to the current map of degrees, we found that course offerings could be streamlined and the structure of the map improved. In other words, we could harness excellence, diversity and complementarity to increase collaboration and integration, or simply to improve. However, proposals can only be implemented if they are supported and managed by the academic directors at the corresponding levels. Therefore, while our analysis has provided a general

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⁶ Studies undertaken by both universities refer to almost 200 active services, taking into account their specialization. In some cases, services are decentralized, in others outsourced and their design varies according to the university.
map, the road map for its implementation depends on a set of factors that call for a gradual approach.

b) In the area of services, we have avoided the temptation to prioritize the proposal of specific Campus services. Instead, we have prioritized the use of cooperation and complementarity in the design, with a view to improvement, alliance or integration in the mid-to-long term. For example, each university has its own science and technology service or centre that comprises all its available instruments and technology, which may be duplicated or complementary. Our work has been to coordinate them. In this case, the simplicity of the design of the two science and technology services has made it easy to establish a road map based on coordination and communication. The road map for other services is more complex.

Other areas illustrate the considerable usefulness of the path that has been taken. For instance, in research, which depends on each group leader or leaders, the critical masses, cooperation and existence of knowledge transfer centres and university technology centres were determining factors in the creation of a map. In fact, the work of knowledge transfer services could be particularly useful in the proposal of cross-disciplinary projects that foster a culture of cooperation and alliance. Doctoral programmes, formal services and internal services are some of the areas where there is still considerable work to be done, and in which informal alliance structures could be established.

Finally, governance is another area that must be considered at each stage of the road map, to ensure that the stated goals reflect the realities of the situation. In this area, we should also take into account circumstances resulting from legislation on university governance, for example the stipulations that a new rector must be elected every four years, and new deans, directors of schools, faculties and departments and other positions every three years.

**Strategic proposal for the short, medium and long term**

a) **In the short term: plausible actions**
   - Visualize the reality of the Campus. Increase the self-esteem of all members through acknowledgement of excellence.
   - Fill existing gaps in the Campus structure and in the functions that it could fulfil.
   - Complete the analysis of BKC services that could be improved, focusing particularly on science and technology services, sports, and university halls of residence.
   - Increase cultural exchange to foster greater cooperation between research groups. Promote this by means of real incentives for researchers.
   - Continue to promote alliance through realistic actions. A greater international presence (BKCnet), postgraduate education (master’s degrees, joint participation in calls for proposals such as Erasmus Mundus programmes, etc.) and cooperation in research through cross-cutting projects have been more successful in practice than other approaches that appear to be more ambitious on paper.

b) **In the medium term: complex actions**
   - Merge and simplify degrees. This task falls within the scope of the Spanish government rather than the governance structures of the BKC and the two universities. Incentives should be provided to facilitate the process.
   - Propose and promote governance reforms and changes in accountability to aid the positive development of the campus.
   - Provide incentives for research groups and Campus services to increase their implication in bringing about academic improvements and financial savings.

c) **In the long term: speculative actions**
   - Integrate when such action is clearly identified as feasible.
   - Adopt a model of disseminating results.
   - Establish specific, institutionalized, effective governance for the Campus.

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