IDENTITY OF THE MILITARY ACADEMY OF LAND FORCES IN WROCŁAW – RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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Abstract:

The article presents the results of empirical research conducted in the selected opinion groups in the Military Academy of Land Forces in Wrocław (MALF) on the perception of the Academy's identity components. The paper forms a part of the project entitled "Key Issues in Creating the Image of the Military Academy of Land Forces in Wrocław". The military education in Poland was reorganised in 2005, as a result of which the military academies expanded their activity and began to admit civilian students. In an attempt to solve the research problem of how to create a system enabling the MALF to compete effectively in the market of educational services, a research hypothesis was formulated, highlighting the necessity of making changes to the existing structure of identity. The purpose of the article is to establish the current MALF's identity components and to de-termine the possible changes in the system in the new market situation.

Keywords:

identity, image, identity research, identity attributes

INTRODUCTION

The building of identity consists in establishing the attributes differentiating a given organisation from other market participants, its closest competitors in particular [1]. he multitude of elements defining an organisation's identity[1] renders this process long-lasting and requiring planning and consistency.

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[1]   They include, among others, core values of a given organisation, operational objectives, organisational culture, production methods, products and services, management style, intellectual potential, ways of communication and elements of visual identification.

The development of an organisation's identity is not a new phenomenon in economic practice. However, in Poland so far both practice and theory have focused mainly on profit-oriented organisations.

The Military Academy of Land Forces in Wrocław (MALF) is a public tertiary institution. The specific character of public higher education institutions resides in fulfilling their non-profit tasks, such as the transfer of knowledge, the development of students' personality, the education of academic staff and research and development works. A higher education establishment functions as a development centre, a driver of change or an institution of public life [2].

In 2009, the MALF, which by that time educated exclusively officers for the needs of the Armed Forces, began to admit civilian students. Consequently, the Academy has become an entity competing on the market of educational services[2].

The functioning under the conditions of strong market competition, entry into new markets, application of new solutions, offer of new products and services or new stakeholders coming into play determine the necessity of the conscious development of identity, as one of the tools for building competitive advantage [7].

To operate effectively it is necessary to identify the key issues related to the building of the Academy's identity and to provide decision-making recommendations for executive managers. The obtained research results should also be useful in developing the identity of other military schools in Poland.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

The primary research was conducted for the purposes of the project carried out as part of statutory research activities, entitled *Key Issues in Creating the Image of the Military Academy of Land Forces in Wrocław*. During the research the attention was focused on identity, being the sum of elements identifying the organisation and influencing its image.

A research hypothesis was formulated in the course of the works, assuming that under the conditions of strong competition on the educational market and because of the changes taking place in the MALF's environment in Wrocław it was necessary to make

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[2] In September 2005, the Law on Higher Education came into force, pursuant to which uniform educational standards were introduced and the separation between military and civilian education systems was abolished. In this period in Poland there were 130 public higher education institutions, attended by over 1,333,000 people, and there were 1,194,700 people aged 18-19 (potential students) (the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS), the status as at December 2005). By the academic year 2009/2010, i.e. the year from which the MALF would admit also civilian students, the number of the state's tertiary institutions increased by one, whereas the number of students decreased by almost 5% and potential students, by almost 10%. In the academic year 2010/2011, the number of the state's tertiary institutions increased to 132. This level was maintained until the academic year 2012/2013 (covered by the research period), whereas the number of students attending these institutions dropped at the same time (by almost 4% in relation to the academic year 2009/2010 and almost 9% in comparison with the academic year 2005/2006: own work on the basis of GUS 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2013 b). It should be added that Polish students have also the opportunity to make use of the educational offer of Polish non-public tertiary institutions and foreign establishments.

corrections to the Academy's existing identity. Therefore, it was determined that the areas significant from the point of view of the Academy's identity would have to be diagnosed as well as the ones in which procedures required refinement.

The above hypothesis set out the research area and directions for empirical research on the MALF's identity.

The collection of information from the primary sources was quality oriented. The aim was to gather as many pieces of information as possible regarding the respondents' attitudes and preferences. Therefore, open-ended questions were prepared and in the description of the results, contained in this paper, the percentage distribution of responses in the sample population was not presented. From the point of view of conducted research it was considered that the solution variants proposed by the respondents would be more welcome.

It was assumed that the answers given by the respondents would be used to:

- determine the quality of activities undertaken in the area of the Academy's identity;
- provide indications on whether and how the respective components of the MALF's existing identity were perceived by the examined opinion group;
- define the postulated changes in the identity system.

The research objective was to identify the existing components of the MALF's identity and to determine the possible changes, aimed at increasing the effectiveness of impact, concerning the current identity. The fulfilment of the research objective included an empirical examination of observed patterns.

2. SELECTION OF A RESEARCH SAMPLE

All necessary data, supposed to be helpful in defining the Academy's optimum identity, were gathered by means of a survey questionnaire.

The first step in the process of selecting the sample was to define the general population. Taking into account its subject the research could only concern the stakeholders of the MALF. The survey was addressed to the purposefully selected group of respondents. The criterion for selecting individuals for research was the nature of stakeholders. By selecting respondents arbitrarily, depending on their position in the structure of the organisation's environment, it was determined that for the purpose of conducted research the information of interest would be the one obtained from the internal addressees of the image, who met the following requirements:

- they knew the basics of management – being conversant with management concepts they should understand the need for building the identity;
- they functioned in the organisation for a relatively short time – they already became familiar with the attributes of the organisation's identity, but they did not get accustomed to them yet, and therefore they were able to make a critical assessment of the existing identity system.

On the basis of the three-step characteristics it was possible to establish a sample unit. Individuals drawn to take part in the research should belong to the subjective environment of the MALF, study, majoring in Management, and be a first-year student. On the basis of the specification of types of programmes realised by the MALF the first-year students majoring in Management, attending the full-time civil and military bachelor programme, full-time civil and military master programme and part-time master programme[3] were identified as eligible for research. From March to May 2013, the total of 424 people participated in the research.

After the selection and verification of collected source data a set of 379 responses was obtained, which represented the proper research group. As the selection was non-random it excluded the estimation of a sampling error and, in addition, prescribed caution when interpreting the results of the analyses with regard to the whole population of stakeholders of the MALF. The formulated conclusions can be used to establish the patterns in the investigated population.

3. LIST OF REQUIRED INFORMATION

Before the survey was started the inventory of required information was prepared. The primary information was collected by means of the most popular research method – a questionnaire. By analysing the information type, available from the secondary sources, two classes of required information were determined, to be gathered in the conducted primary research.

The first group of questions, concerning the degree of identification of key aspects of identity, was used to diagnose the significance of identity in the MALF and the effectiveness of promotional activities undertaken in the area of the Academy's identity. To achieve this aim it was attempted to determine:

- whether the examined respondents were able to identify the key addressees of the Academy's identity;
- whether they were able to describe the respective elements of the MALF's visual identification;
- which elements of the Academy's website demonstrated its functionality and ergonomics and which of them could be used for the creation of a new identity;
- what changes had been made so far to the attributes of the MALF's identity.

The second group of questions was designed to collect proposals for possible changes in the area of shaping the Academy's identity. It was attempted to determine, in particular:

- which elements and why could form a multidimensional model characterising the identity of the MALF;

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3   In the academic year 2012/2013, the MALF did not admit any students for a part-time bachelor programme with a Management major.

- what possibilities were available to make the MALF's offer stand out against competition, using the marketing tools;
- which elements on the Academy's website should be changed to improve its functionality;
- which elements on the Academy's website could serve as an effective image tool;
- whether there were any elements currently missing on the website that should be placed there, and finally;
- what changes in the identity system were postulated by the respondents.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE OBTAINED RESULTS

In the first question the respondents were asked to point out the addressees of the MALF's identity in Wrocław. Among the addressees of the MALF's identity the respondents most often listed the recipients of the Academy's offer, namely:

- officer trainees;
- civilian students;
- professional soldiers taking part in courses.

The MALF's employees represented the next group of addressees of the identity specified in the responses. This group included:

- teaching staff: academic lecturers and professional soldiers; and
- administrative staff, both uniformed and civilian.

In the case of the analysed military Academy the cooperating entities were also mentioned as the important addressees of the identity, such as:

- military units;
- training centres;
- Military Draft Offices;
- other civil tertiary institutions and military schools in Poland and abroad;
- primary, middle and secondary schools;
- provincial offices;
- municipalities;
- sponsors;

and market competitors:

- other military tertiary institutions (the Military University of Technology in Warsaw (WAT), the Polish Air Force Academy (WSOSP), foreign military academies);
- other tertiary institutions offering similar major courses (the Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Universities of Economics).

The so-called other addressees were listed equally often as the last two large groups mentioned in the responses and included:

- students' and employees' families;
- media;
- local community.

However, the group of entities supervising and financing educational and research activities, important from the Academy's point of view, was specified by the respondents as the addressees of the identity relatively rarely:

- Ministry of National Defence;
- Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

The level of knowledge of the Academy's identity was examined by determining the degree of identification of attributes distinguishing the MALF in Wrocław. To achieve this aim the respondents were asked to indicate:

- symbols used by the organisation to stand out in the environment;
- characteristic attitudes and behaviours;
- ways of communicating with the environment.

In the course of the investigation into the knowledge of symbols the students, on the basis of the diagram enclosed to the question, were tasked with describing the elements that should be a part of the system of the MALF's visual identification in Wrocław.

On the basis of the research results it was found out that the respondents (officer trainees in particular) knew the Academy's origin, were familiar with the colours of the Academy's flags, standards, banners and pennants, had no problem with describing the uniform and explaining the meaning of the component parts of the Academy's logotype and could identify badges and signs.

Officer trainees were also well conversant with the Academy's architecture, i.e. the exterior and interior design of the buildings, and the visual information, including internal information boards, located on the premises of the Academy's campus, and external information boards placed outside the Academy.

The second part, which focused on establishing the status of knowledge of the Academy's identity by its internal stakeholders, consisted in enumerating independently the behaviours that distinguished the MALF against its market competitors.

In this part the respondents (mainly officer trainees) did not have any problems with describing the specific nature of their Academy, either. They emphasised the significance of regulations, drills, reporting lines, mandatory participation in the classes, being on duty, warming up exercises in the morning or other observed rituals such as, for example, the regrouping of the whole unit when going to the canteen.

Characteristic elements that distinguish the military studies from the civilian ones include uniforms, accommodation (in the barracks for military students and in the dorm

for civilian students), meals, medical care, no scholarships for officer trainees in exchange for a monthly pay and a holiday break replaced with a leave.

Communication with the environment was the last area in which attempts were made to identify key issues related to the MALF's identity.

In the army, communication is based mainly on the chain of command, which is described in detail in the relevant regulations. Each soldier becomes acquainted with the rules of military conduct during the first days of staying with the unit and, therefore, the Academy's communication with its environment was limited to external communication. As in the today's world communication has to be low cost, global, quick, interactive and easily accessible, the research in this part was focused on the Internet, i.e. a communication carrier which has all the above-mentioned features [4]. A website is one of the more important tools used for building an organisation's identity by means of the Internet[4].

Consequently, the respondents were asked if they knew which elements on the MALF's website demonstrated its functionality and ergonomics and which ones rendered it an effective image tool[5]?

In the respondents' opinion the content of the homepage should be reduced to a minimum. They stated that too many icons or links should not be used and the ease of navigation and quick window opening should be the priority. The homepage should contain such elements as:

- site search engine;
- site map;
- differentiation between active and inactive elements;
- highlighted links;
- hierarchical header titles;
- entry path;
- main menu in the horizontal bar and navigation menu in the vertical bar.

The students taking part in the research also pointed out that the names used in the menu should be unambiguous and the text, legible and transparent. The website should be built on one page and all information should be available in three clicks at a maximum.

When asked about the rules ensuring the image effectiveness of a website that were met by the Academy's website the respondents enumerated the following characteristics:

- homepage contains the description of the entity;

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4 *The Public Information Bulletin was not analysed as the related issues are stipulated in detail in the Act of 6 September 2001 on Access to Public Information, the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 11 October 2005 on minimum requirements for ICT systems and the Regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration of 18 January 2007 on the Public Information Bulletin.*

5 The respondents' suggestions were used to improve the MALF's website.

- in terms of identity, the main page is consistent with subpages;
- to enhance the reliability of the Academy's website it is often updated by placing descriptions of selected current events and adding new photos, and a newsletter is sent on a daily basis to the cooperating entities;
- contact for the media is also conducive to building the organisation's image;
- effectiveness of the Academy's website as an image tool is determined by the number of visits, which in the case of the state-owned tertiary institution is correlated with how the website ranks on the search engine results pages.

The respondents listed the following as the advantages of the Academy's website:

- legible navigation bar with links to the most important areas of the site;
- placement of a search engine on the site, owing to which the required content can be easily located;
- placement of the news on the main page with links to full articles;
- provision of the information about the Academy's development, actions in which students are involved and support for the injured during the missions conducted outside Poland;
- links to the educational platform;
- remaining tags, available in the left upper section of the main page, such as the information about the courses, collections of the Academy's library or sports sections.

In the first series of questions, which was designed to determine the effectiveness of activities conducted in the area of identity by the MALF in Wrocław, the last question to the respondents was whether they were familiar with the changes introduced so far to the Academy's system of identity.

The students were aware of the transformation occurring in the MALF's identity. They knew that the Academy's core mission had not changed and it was still to educate young officers for the needs of the Polish Armed Forces. Since 2009, despite the above, the Academy has educated also civilian students, majoring in Management and National Security, and raised the qualifications of other soldiers through various courses.

Due to the performed transformations the Academy is no longer subordinated to the Land Forces Command, but to the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

The respondents knew how and why the Academy's name evolved, as well as its emblem, badges or the colour of the beret. They attributed the variations to the ceremonial dress uniform to changing tastes and prevailing fashion trends, but they emphasised the importance of the tradition of the Polish Armed Forces and referring to it with respect to that matter. In the case of the battle dress uniform the respondents understood that inevitable changes resulted from the development of technology and camouflage possibilities.

With regard to the architecture of the buildings and building structures the respondents did not observe any significant changes. However, they pointed out that earlier the specialist equipment had been available on the Academy's premises, while at present the officer trainees went for their practical training to the dedicated centres. Formerly, the sports facilities were used only by the officer trainees and the staff, whereas at present, the existing infrastructure is available also to civilians.

While designing the second part of the research it was assumed that the selected respondents, being in direct contact with the organisation and conversant with the issues related to the Academy's identity, could help in establishing the areas of the identity of the MALF's in Wrocław which required changes.

The work started with establishing the most characteristic distinguishing features of the Academy's identity and justifying the choice made. Therefore, an attempt was made to build a multidimensional model (*identity mix*) that would describe the specific nature of the MALF.

While illustrating the Academy's identity the students put the most emphasis on the organisational culture in place, the symbolic meaning of the standard, military uniform, provisions and regulations, characteristic organisational structure, way of communication and provided services.

In the next question the respondents were asked to list (and justify) the proposed factors that could be presented as advantages, owing to which the MALF's educational offer stands out favourably against competition.

When competing in the market the organisation may implement a cost leadership strategy, narrow or broad specialisation [6]. In the marketing theory the examples of building the market advantage in the area of identity include the range of additional services, equipment, staff that stands out, tradition and its contemporisation or confidence standard [1].

In the case of the Academy the respondents believed that competition was most justified on the grounds of the staff's qualifications, tradition and confidence. However, the most frequent suggestion for making the educational offer stand out was to rely on the dominant competence, i.e. the tradition of the Polish Armed Forces.

As mentioned before, the building of an organisation's desirable image is a long-term process. It necessitates the development of a coherent identity system, in which changes are made as required. On the one hand such changes must be systematic and gradual, while on the other hand they must be imperceptible for the addressees, so that the continuity in the area of identity is maintained. Following the above recommendation it was deemed justified and necessary to identify the elements of the Academy's website that required improvement so as to make it an effective image tool.

According to the respondents' opinion, the MALF's website should:
- have its visual design changed, to evoke stronger associations with the military; for example replacing the cursor with a machine gun, which would improve the aesthetic qualities of the site;

- have uniform colours and the quality of photos should be improved;
- have the appearance of respective links improved and standardised, e.g. library, educational platform and recruitment section (currently lacking transparency and intuitiveness);
- have a drop-down list operate in the same way in each web browser;
- guarantee that all tabs designed as active can be used as such and that they present the up-to-date content.

In the next question, aimed at improving the image function of the MALF's website, the respondents were asked to present their proposals of modules (tags, links), currently missing, which should be added to the Academy's website. The respondents suggested to add:

- tab presenting the Academy's location on the map of Poland;
- tab with a virtual trip to the Academy's campus;
- film encouraging to study at the MALF;
- tab describing the Academy's achievements: its students, employees and graduates;
- calendar with the information about the upcoming events taking place at the MALF;
- links to social networking sites (e.g. Facebook);
- entertainment section with online military games, like in the case of other military academies;
- online competitions (e.g. military or historical knowledge) with tickets/passes as prizes;
- separate sites for the existing faculties, employees, and civilian and military students, i.e. the application of a PR technique called targeting;
- generally available database with lecturers' contact data;
- tags representing the most popular words or questions most frequently asked by the site visitors (FAQ).

Furthermore, it was postulated to make it possible for students to have an e-mail address on the Academy's server with an alias @wso.wroc.pl.

The survey questionnaire was concluded with the question about any other changes in the identity system postulated by the respondents. The respondents listed the following**:**

- intensified activities promoting the Academy outside[6], with particular emphasis placed on the possibilities offered by the Internet (including social media) and other available media (e.g. specialist military journals), during

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[6] At present, the Academy's promotion takes place mainly during the education fairs. When looking for prospective students direct promotion is also used, which consists in visiting secondary schools. The research results show that the MALF's educational offer is also recommended via informal channels for passing information (recommendations given by the present students).

public holidays, parades or reconstructions of historical events related to the armed forces;

− purchase of new teaching equipment and books and renovation of the Academy's campus buildings;

− increase in the number of practical classes and making use of available modern teaching resources and methods;

− change in the number of hours of specialist training with the use of military equipment;

− necessity of introducing the mandatory course of the second foreign language;

− increasing the possibility of making use of the sports facilities by officer trainees during their leisure time.

Taking into account the specific character of the MALF the military students taking part in the research stated that the following obligations should not be discarded:

− wearing uniforms by military students;

− being on duty at the subunits;

− annual practical training at the military training grounds;

− following the rules of military conduct and observing the regulations.

5. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

If the degree of identification of key aspects of the MALF's identity is assessed, the students selected for the research turned out to be a valuable source of knowledge. They were conversant with the issues related to the MALF's identity and changes made to its attributes, and understood the necessity of forming the organisation's identity. They also knew the advantages derived from having a website as a tool to mark the presence in the virtual space, providing the opportunity for self-presentation or deciding about the information made available.

However, the respondents had some problems with defining properly the most significant addressees of the Academy's identity. In the category of recipients of the offer they did not include families of students and course participants or the Academy's potential customers, i.e. prospective candidates for students. They also overlooked institutional entities sending their employees out for further education and training or employing the MALF's graduates.

With regard to market competitors the respondents listed the closest competitors, disregarding completely other tertiary institutions with profiles other than management.

The respondents did not list at all such categories as graduates[7] or professional associations, which are very important for the image. There were only single postulates to

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[7] Graduates were not allocated to any other previous category of addressees, either. They were not included in either cooperating entities or recipients of the offer.

address the image-related activities to LOK (the National Defence League) or the Polish Society of War Veterans.

While enumerating information carriers the respondents did not mention any trade media and the "community" category was limited to the local community. Among the responses given there were no mentions of national or international communities.

When asked about respective elements of the MALF's visual identification, the students did not list any issues related to identity which did not concern them. They did not specify any parameters of colours which were not defined. They were not familiar with the issues related to business design, aesthetics, layouts or typography. Similarly, they did not know any guidelines regarding business stationery: paper, envelopes, business cards, commercial documents and billing statements.

The purpose of the second part of the research was to define solutions related to the identity of the MALF in Wrocław that could possibly be implemented. On the basis of the available knowledge [3] and the results of applying the survey methodology, considering the MALF's identity as a concept requiring a broad approach, it was determined that the most important attributes making the Academy stand out against its market competition included:

- organisational culture;
- communication;
- organisational structure;
- mission and strategy.

The postulated identity mix of the MALF and the characteristics of respective component parts of the model are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Model of the identity mix of the MALF in Wrocław, postulated on the basis of the research results

The most significant elements of the MALF's identity model	Characteristics of component parts of the model
Organisational culture	The MALF's organisational culture is perceived by its environment mainly through the prism of broadly defined artefacts. Elements referring to the tradition of the Polish Armed Forces and to the Academy's rich history, among others, should be mentioned here.
Communication	In the case of a military Academy communication is based on the chain of command and is governed by regulations, ordinances and other documents as well as by the principles of tradition which set out the ways of communicating, e.g. by giving orders or following rules of courtesy in conversations.
Organisational structure	Taking into account its military character, the Academy's organisational structure forms an element differentiating it from other civilian tertiary institutions. The MALF in Wrocław has a highly

The most significant elements of the MALF's identity model	Characteristics of component parts of the model
	formalised and centralised line and staff structure. At the Academy the most important person is its Rector-Commandant, whereas at civilian universities it is His/Her Magnificence Rector.
Mission and strategy	The specific nature of mission and strategy of the Military Academy of Land Forces results from the fact that the Academy is under the jurisdiction of both the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Deriving from the tradition of the Polish Armed Forces the Academy provides educational services, preparing its graduates for both military and civilian roles.

Source: Own study

Describing the factors representing the source of competitive advantage the respondents stated that the Academy stood out owing to its staff. It means that establishing a strong position relies on the Academy's activity being rooted in the employees' knowledge, training and development. The careful selection of the highest quality academic staff and the provision of education by soldiers having practical combat experience (gained during the missions), being experts in their respective fields, guarantee for the Academy occupying a niche position on the market of educational services.

The tradition was identified with instilling patriotic values and relying on experience and unwavering management principles, and, concurrently, consistently contemporising the adopted standard, by selecting the elements being stable over time and indispensable for the Academy's existence and development in the future [1].

The respondents described the confidence built on the high quality market offer, long-lasting presence on the market or guarantee of a solid education as an element of particular importance in the sector of educational services[1].

Assessing the MALF's website the respondents concluded that it was *not attractive enough, it did not draw attention and it definitely deviated from the standards set by other tertiary institutions. Despite presenting a wealth of information about the Academy, offered majors and admission procedure, and updating frequently the website pages, the navigation on the website was quite complex, which might discourage its visitors.* In general, for the Academy's website to meet the requirements for an effective image tool, it is necessary to undergo a thorough modernisation or, preferably, to have it built from scratch by a professional PR company.

CONCLUSION

Having assessed the knowledge of the students selected to take part in the research on the identity of the MALF in Wrocław it was concluded, since the respondents were well conversant with the discussed values, that they represented a group of the Academy's

stakeholders that could effectively contribute to building the entity's favourable image in its market environment.

It is also postulated to strengthen the quality of actions taken by promotion units, as the achievement of the highest standards in the area of identity requires consistency of activities. Thence, it is necessary to work out a strategy for action integrated with the remaining areas of the Academy's promotion, addressed to different target groups.

Planned activities aimed at improving the Academy's identity should contribute to its positive image and, on a long-term basis, prestige. Prestige on the market of educational services is a tool ensuring competitive advantage, as it creates great interest in the Academy's offer, which gives the possibility of selecting the best prospective candidates for students and attracting highly qualified academicians, which, in turn, consistently improves the quality of education. The MALF's highly qualified graduates guarantee the effective operation of the Polish defence system under each defence readiness condition and they act as a showcase for the Academy. As the Wrocław military Academy is invariably perceived as the *place where generals are forged,* therefore, it would be advisable to base its activity on the dominant competence, i.e. to make use of such strengths of the MALF and the Polish Armed Forces as the rich tradition, organisational resources and the way of managing a military organisation.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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