

Novi Sad University Report, Second Site Visit

The site visit took place on November 5, 2012 from 9:00-15:00 h

Present:

Experts: Dr. Lucka Lorber, Vice-Rector of the University of Maribor, Slovenia

Prof. Dr. Werner Schaal, President a.D. University of Marburg, Germany

Members of Novi Sad University:

Prof. Dr. Miroslav Veskovic, Rector of Novi Sad University

Prof. Dr. Zita Bosnjak, Vice-Rector for Education of Novi Sad University

Prof. Dr. Milan Simic, former Vice-Rector

Prof. Dr. Radmila Neducin, former Rector

Dubravka Gaurancic, International Office

Milos Milutinovic, International Office

Dr. Mirjana Brkovic, Director of the University Library

Rector's report

The Rector starts with a short description of NSU, established in 1960, counting now about 48.000 students and roughly 4.000 academic and administrative staff, having 14 faculties, 13 of them being legal entities and two institutes. The main problem which still exists since the last site visit in March 2010 is the fact that NSU is a non-integrated university. The university tries very hard to overcome this difficulty and it goes several ways. One of them is to convince legislation to introduce integration by law. But this seems to be nearly impossible. The best what could be achieved up to now is the possibility to have kind of a "functional integration". So the other way is to exploit this possibility of functional integration as much as possible. There exist some positive examples: NSU has installed a central computer center with seven persons working in it, running own servers and taking care of all the technical tasks related to electronic communication and to scientific computing. The experts had a chance to visit this center. But it is noteworthy that the financing is done by a special budget coming from the Ministry of Education. There exist a

central information system for the university and kind of a central data bank. A very important central institution is a central "project office". The people in there take care of all kinds of applications for financing research and other projects, mainly coming from the Serbian government and the EU.

The university library is a central institution, too. But it owns only about 15.000 volumes (12.000 in 2010) whereas the faculties employ more than 120 librarians (83 in 2010) and own more than one million books. The university library has a budget (2012) of about 300.000 Euro. It runs an integrated information system for the university and offers workshops for all faculties.

The international office is also integrated (see later).

On the other hand the university is only partly autonomous concerning the budget. The budget does not come as a lump sum to the university but all faculties obtain their budgets directly from the ministry. The Rector figures that the budget for 2012, coming to the faculties and the central administration amounts to 80 million Euro. Faculties pay the salaries of their professors out of their budgets and also material and some maintenance of their offices. They give a small percentage of their budgets to the central administration to keep the university technically running. It should also be mentioned that some of the FB7 projects go through the faculties, some through the Rector. For the Rector it seems to be hard to find out how much money the faculties really have. There is regular information about the enrollment numbers in all Serbia and especially the numbers concerning NSU can be found on the website. The faculties get an upper bound for the number of such students whom they are allowed to enroll but they are free to make enrollments inside this bound. This number is approved by the Academic Senate and the ministry.

The Rector succeeded to install and to run some interdisciplinary research projects and programs. So NSU takes care of point 7, Knowledge Society, of the big Danube project. The Rector runs a project called "FB 7 and Horizon 2020". He also signed an agreement with CERN for all kinds of scientific cooperation. Moreover, because the university feels to have a social mission for regional development it runs several programs in rather rural and poor areas concerning the education of pre-school teachers, also vocational training. It should be mentioned that NSU has five dislocated parts in Vojvodina.

Finally the Rector mentions that the university installed a center for quality whose president is a member of the Academic Senate and completely independent.

All these activities getting around the non-integrated status of the university very positive as they are cannot hide and conceal that this status is still of disadvantage for the university. It is hard to judge from outside which role the Academic Senate plays concerning the Rector's attempts of integration: There are all deans represented in the Academic Senate, five so-called "experts" and some others, altogether eleven. The Rector stresses his endeavours to sign agreements with the deans.

Report of the Vice-Rector for Education

NSU implemented fully all Bologna programs (since 2005). But because there exists some criticism of the strict 3-2-3 sequence there are some modifications allowed by the law (2010, modified September 2012). So there exist regular three-year BA-programs followed by two-year MA-studies. But there are also four-year BA-programs followed by only one-year MA-studies. The latter BA is called "BA with honours". According to the figures of 2011 about 50% of the BA graduates go on to MA-studies, a percentage which the university considers as very big. The reason is probably the fact that employers are still not convinced of the qualifications of graduates holding a BA-degree only. It was interesting to learn that NSU hands out two copies of the diploma certificates: the "regular" Serbian one and one in English language. There are also bilingual certificates (Hungarian and Serbian etc.) Moreover, graduates receive a "Diploma supplement". The Vice-Rector points out that although the general unemployment in Vojvodina is very high, 20-25%, the unemployment rate for holders of an MA-degree or a PH.D. is astonishingly low (2%?).

Quality of the existing although accredited study programs is measured fairly regularly. Also, students are asked for filling out questionnaires about their professors. There are consequences for an academic teacher who does not seem to obey rules of "good" teaching three times in a row: He is not any longer eligible for certain academic offices.

NSU runs several programs for LLL for academic staff, but also programs for improving teaching and foreign language qualities. There exist programs for administrative staff, too.

International office.

As mentioned above the international office works as an institution of the central administration. There are five people working in it and there are seven faculties which have international coordinators. The number of incoming, outgoing, degree-seeking students and free movers seems not to be known on the central level. The international office does not know the numbers of students studying in certain faculties. It is interesting to realize that students from Montenegro and Bosnian and Herzegovina are treated, by contract, in the same way as Serbian students. The international office tries to organize all kinds of language courses for Serbian and foreign students. Certain modules in some study programs, e.g. medical studies, are taught in foreign languages, mainly in English. But it is not quite understandable that courses taught in a foreign language are more expensive than those taught in Serbian. It is also kind of deplorable that foreign students are not subsidized the same way as Serbian students concerning dormitory rents and food in the student restaurant.

Up to now Serbia does not belong to the ERASMUS-program, but will be in it from 2013 on. Then the number of students, incoming and outgoing should increase considerably.

There was a very nice and vivid presentation by a female student about an event organized by the students in last October, the so-called "Campus Festival". It shows that this university is full of life!

Final remarks by the experts.

It is obvious that NSU made considerable and big progress in many important areas since the site visit in March 2010. The Rector's good and very good achievements make it easy to believe in his "visions" for the years up to 2020. But experts, contrary to the Rector, identify two obstacles which should be overcome rather soon: NSU must get full autonomy in all of its operations as soon as possible. Ministries should give free universities and should allow them to follow their own way. It is kind of frustrating to realize that politics are involved in nearly all, even minor decisions.

The Rectors denies this dependence, more precisely, he claims that ministry has some obligations to observe how universities act. He mentions upper limits for tuition fees, checking that all activities obey legal rules and especially the necessity for universities to take over social responsibilities. The Rector especially mentions that the universities are free in creating study programs – they only depend on the accreditation of independent agencies.

We wish NSU that it proceeds on its very successful way.

Lucka Lorber

Werner Schaal