

Split University Report, Second Site Visit

The site visit took place on October 31, 2012 from 9:00 – 15:00h

Present:

Experts:

Prof. Dr. Luc Francois, Gent University, Belgium

Prof. Dr. Werner Schaal, Marburg University, Germany

Members of Split University:

Prof. Dr. Ivan Pavic, Rector

Prof. Dr. Roko Andricevic, Vice-Rector for Science and International Relations

Prof. Dr. Dragon Bolonca, Vice-Rector for Juridical and Personnel Issues

Tonci Zakarija, Head of Legal Department

Ana Cosic, Head of International Relations Office

The visit was well organized and the talks took place in a friendly and cooperative manner in the Rector's office. All the people we met were aware of our visit, of the objectives of the project and of the state of affairs. They all spoke in a very open and constructive way about the progress they made in the recent years and about the problems they face and that they try to solve.

Rector's report

The Rector pointed out that he and the Rectorate in the last years and still now are mainly dealing with the following three topics:

- a) Study programs and their reaccreditation
- b) Human resources
- c) Connection to the "outer world" as he calls this activity

Concerning a): The university is very busy since a long time to get their study programs, BA and MA, reaccredited. This is done by an independent government institution. Certain parameters are checked and there exists a

special software which was established to do this as efficiently as possible. One very important parameter is the ratio between students and professors. The limit is 30:1. The evaluation can have three possible outcomes: i) Everything is okay – positive without restrictions. ii) Several items have to be improved during the next two or three years – positive with restrictions, Expectation letter is formulated. iii) The study program cannot be continued – completely negative. The Rector mentions in this context that the university created a Center for Quality Assurance.

It is also important to state that there exists a vivid discussion in all faculties and institutions about possibilities to improve the instruments applied by the Bologna reform (length of the first cycle and its contents, employability of graduates holding a BA only).

Concerning b): The university is still preferring their own graduates when it comes to fill the positions of a professor or another teaching staff position. The positions are advertised but there are nearly zero applications from outside. The reasons can be understood only historically and culturally: Hesitation to move to another place with the whole family. This has to change probably in the not too far future because of the need to hire only the best qualified people who are available on the market. It is obvious that this situation has negative consequences for the quality of research and teaching. The Dean of the Law Faculty adds that the unemployment rate in Croatia and in this region is high and that only about 40% of the law graduates find an appropriate job. The Law Faculty has about 3.000-4.000 students. Nearly all of them try to obtain a masters degree and study between six and seven years which is an unhealthy situation.

The university tries, together with the government, to create programs and workshops for LLL, Lifelong Learning, and the permanent improvement of all kinds of qualities of its academic and administrative staff, e.g. didactical qualifications, introduction of new programs in the administration etc.

Concerning c): In this context the Rector talks about the internationalization of Split University, especially about the introduction of a six year study program for medicine (the former lasted five years only), the fact that all lectures in medicine are given in English parallel to Croatian and about modules in economy and civil engineering which are also taught in English. (Internationalization of Split University will be discussed later in more detail.)

Split University is a non-integrated university and this causes all the well-known problems. But as mentioned in the report about Rijeka University already Split also tries to improve this situation by practicing "functional integration". Positive examples are the building of the new campus the planning of which is completely in the hands of the Rectorate, the

creation of a central information system and the before mentioned center for quality assurance. Moreover, there exists a central international office headed by a very active person.

In some sense one can also count as a positive example for functional integration the allocation of the governmental budget to the faculties. The budget is given as a lump sum from the government to the university. Rector and Academic Senate decide, at least formally, about the parameters according to which this sum is allocated to the faculties and institutions. On the other hand the Rector is not too well informed about faculty incomes in addition to the budget. It should be mentioned that the faculties enroll their students and they keep the tuition fees for themselves. Moreover, the government gives a certain amount of money to the universities just for research. These funds are given in addition to the budget. More precisely: The governmental "research money" momentarily amounts to 140 million Croatian kunas (1 Euro~7.5 kuna). One third of this money is given to the universities directly, the other two thirds are going to a National Academy. Faculties and institutions can apply there for funds for research projects.

At least one job position for career office should be given and approved by government.

Human resources: There are not enough applications for open positions although there is high unemployment. One of the key criteria in many European countries for hiring professors, at least in sciences is a stay abroad.

Integration

Functional integration:

- Money from the government comes to the Rectorate and is allocated to the faculties on criteria decided by the senate (cf. above)
- Enrolment: done in the faculties, but according to one central system. Number of students and level of fee decided by the senate, but students pay to the faculties. Selection of students centralised by the government.
- Internationalisation
- International projects
- New buildings on the new campus are owned by the university and no longer by the faculties.
- System of student grants centralised
- Biggest problem: Academic Senate does not want to decide against the deans who are not in favour of integration

Relations with external stakeholders

Croatian universities consult each other about medical programmes and internships.

The external stakeholders are not consulted during the process of (re)construction of programmes of study.

Programmes

All programmes at the University of Split are now subject to reaccreditation (process started in 2009). The accreditation is done by an autonomous commission, recognized in the European Register of Higher Education Accreditation Organisations. Quite a high number of disciplines receive a conditional answer ('yes, but to repair some elements in a period of 2 years' time, cf. above).

The National Council for Higher Education developed a strategic plan in which is mentioned to what criteria proposals for new programmes have to respond. These criteria are also used as part of the reaccreditation process. Proposals for new programmes are submitted to these criteria if financing by the authorities is required. For other programmes (financed by the university by their own means), these criteria are applied in the process of reaccreditation. At the university of Split the 'Centre for Quality Assurance' uses (together with the faculty commissions for Quality Assurance) these criteria also for the internal evaluation process.

In the perception of a certain number of staff members, 'Bologna' is seen as the cause of a higher teaching task for staff and an unreasonable workload for students. This is of course due to the fact that, at the moment of the introduction of Bologna, programmes were not redesigned in line with the learning outcomes approach. There is hope to restore this once the law on the Qualification Structure will be voted by the Croatian Parliament.

As said before, external stakeholders are not involved in the considerations about the programmes. As a consequence it is not guaranteed that programmes match with the needs of society. Among other reasons, this results in a number of students and graduates not in line with societal expectations (f. e. faculty of Law).

Internationalisation

In the field of internationalisation, the University of Split made a remarkable progress in the recent period. The staff of the Internationalisation Office is small (too small to catch with the continuing growth!), but is very professional and highly motivated. They cooperate in a positive way with the persons in charge for internationalisation in the faculties.

Like other Croatian Higher Education Institutions, the University of Split participates in the Erasmus Programme: since 2009 they can receive incoming students and since 2011 they can send out students to institutions inside the European Union. Once Croatia will be member of the EU, the institutions will have more possibilities to send and to receive students. The progress the university made recently is very remarkable. This academic year, the university receives about 35 incoming students in the Winter Semester and sends out about 130 students in the same semester. These exchanges take mainly place in some faculties, while others are less active in this field. The university signed more than one hundred LLP agreements with partner institutions. Most exchanges take place with neighbouring countries.

The university pays a lot of attention to the quality of the exchanges. It takes care of the incoming students by organizing events, by helping them in the administrative procedures (visa!), in their search for accommodation and by appointing buddies. The university also collaborates with ESN. The university offers a language course to incoming students. In the faculty of Medicine, it is already possible for incoming degree seeking students to complete the whole study in English. Last year 20 incoming students started this study and this year already 50. There are also plans to introduce this also in Computer Sciences, Business and Civil Engineering.

Incoming guest professors (through the Erasmus programme or others) are 'promoters' of internationalisation and of mobility. It has to be said that staff mobility is in most cases taken up by those who are already convinced by the added value of a stay abroad.

Croatian students, returning from a stay abroad, receive full academic recognition, on condition – of course – that the results of the assessments abroad were positive and on condition that students did what was mentioned in the learning agreement. In some case, when students missed obligatory courses while being abroad, they have to do some extra examinations upon return. This brings their global workload on more than 60 credits for a full academic year.

The progress made recently is – as said before – very remarkable. Nevertheless, there are still some difficulties and some points of attention.

The shortage of accommodation, exploited by the university, is not only bad for Croatian students. It is obvious that incoming students even face more difficulties in order to find a decent accommodation. The assistance of the International Relations Office has to be praised but is of course not a structural solution.

Attention has to be paid on faculties that are not (or not yet) active in the field of internationalization. Several studies showed already the advantages of a well-organized stay abroad of high quality.

Asking a workload of more than 60 credits for an academic year (although mentioned on the diploma supplement) can be a negative motivation for some students as it can have a negative influence on their results. By restructuring the programme (f. e. introduction to mobility windows) in general or by a more flexible approach for these students (this is not: easier!), this situation can certainly be solved.

Staff

Staff vacancies are published in Croatia (not abroad), but in practice most places are taken up by internal candidates.

There is a kind of internal staff training, but there is no real follow up: these trainings are limited to some workshops. Parallel initiatives are also organised by the ministry in Zagreb.

There is no real screening of job descriptions or needs; although it is generally known that there is no good balance between what universities need and the qualifications of supporting staff they have.

Research

Research is the first and main victim of the lack of integration. Stimulation of research is almost impossible, as a part of the research money goes to not less than 29 research institutions. PhD students are paid directly by the government independently of the university budget. Although there are several forms of cooperation with these institutes (guidance of PhD-students and functions as guest and external professors), a closer cooperation would be welcomed. The process of reaccreditation – also for

these institutes – will hopefully lead to closer cooperation or merging into universities.

Final remarks by the experts

The University of Split faces – from the point of view of governance – three huge problems: there is a lack of integration (there is no legal back up for the moment) and there is also a lack of autonomy towards the government. It is amazing to see in how many aspects of university life, the government intervenes. There is also the internal problem that not everyone is convinced by the advantages of integration. As a consequence the 'functional integration' does not go as far as is desirable: the Academic Senate does not want to decide against the deans who are not in favour of integration. But it is obvious that much progress has been achieved since the first site visit in March 2010. Split University makes successive efforts to become a modern and competitive university. We wish the university all the best for its future.

Luc Francois

Werner Schaal