



A R A C I S
Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

E x t e r n a l I n s t i t u t i o n a l E v a l u a t i o n

Universitatea Sapientia
Cluj-Napoca, Miercurea Ciuc, Târgo-Mureş, Romania
April 14 to 16, 2010

F o r e i g n E x p e r t R e p o r t

28th April 2010

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1. Introduction

This visit to Sapientia University for institutional evaluation and accreditation was my third participation in an ARACIS external evaluation procedure in Romania. As a member of the pool of experts of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) I have already participated in 15 evaluations in several European countries and in Columbia. EUA and ARACIS are both committed to standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance in higher education such as formulated in the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). IEP does not accreditate and has a strong emphasis on the self evaluation process within the evaluated institution and the institution's capacity for improvement and change in order to face the current challenges of higher education. ARACIS is also concerned with the accreditation of Romanian universities and their study programmes. Hence the ARACIS external evaluations have a focus on the quality of study programmes and the standards of issuing diplomas and certificates.

The following observations and comments partially will reflect also my IEP-background. They should not be considered as criticism but more as a friendly advice how to improve and face the current problems of higher education.

My thanks go to Rector Dr. László Dávid and to the Chief Registrar Melina Hauer from Sapientia University for the perfect organization of my visit. Especially I want to thank my colleague from mathematics, Dr. Erika Tamási in Cluj-Napoca for her wonderful job in guiding me around and translating discussions in Romanian language to me. The University met all my wishes for meetings and visits and provided a very generous hospitality. Furthermore, I also want to express my appreciation to all members of the evaluation team and the various members of Sapientia University, who have actively participated in the meetings and considerably contributed by their open discussions to a good knowledge of the institution. Last but not least I want to thank Ms. Oana Sarbu from ARACIS for inviting me to this visit and her friendly way of holding contact with me and managing all challenges.

2. Organizational Details of Sapientia University

The Sapientia University of Cluj-Napoca is a private institution of higher education. The teaching language in this institution is Hungarian. For this the University is important and representative for the Hungarian minority in Romania. The University was founded by the Sapientia Foundation and obtained the provisional authorisation of functioning by government decree in 2002. Besides the rectorate and the central administration as well as one study centre in Cluj-Napoca there exist centres of study also in Miercurea Ciuc and in Târgo-Mureş.

The Faculty of Sciences and Arts in Cluj-Napoca consists of the Department of Environ-

mental Science, the Department of Media and the Department of European Studies. The Faculty offers four undergraduate study programmes.

In Miercurea Ciuc there are two Faculties, the Faculty of Sciences and the Faculty of Economic and Human Sciences. The Faculty of Sciences consists of the Department of Social Sciences, the Research Centre for Applied Social Sciences, the Department of Food Sciences, the Department of Technical and Natural Sciences and the BIBIRC Research Centre for Biotechnology. The Faculty of Economic and Human Sciences contains the Department of Business Sciences, the Department of Economic Sciences, the Department of Human Sciences, the OECONOMICA Research Centre and the Intercultural Encounters Research Centre of the Department of Human Sciences. In the study centre Miercurea Ciuc nine undergraduate programmes are offered, five of them being proposed for accreditation.

The Faculty of Technical and Human Sciences is situated in Târgo-Mureş. It contains the Department of Human Sciences, the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, the Department of Electric Engineering, the Department of Mechanic Engineering and the Department of Horticulture. The Faculty offers ten undergraduate study programmes, four of them being proposed for accreditation.

The ARACIS external evaluation visit to Sapientia University was fixed for April 14 to 16 of 2010. The 56 pages Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of Sapientia University was provided in time and gave a very informative and excellent description of the institution and its three locations. I want to emphasize that the SER contains also self-critical parts and mentions problems too. Hence the SER gave a very good preparation to understand the advantages and problems of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania already before the visit. The only thing I was missing in the SER was the list of authors.

3. Outline of the Review

I started the visit to Sapientia University in the evening of April 13 with a working dinner with Rector Prof. Dr. László Dávid, the Scientific Research Director Prof. Zoltán Kása, the former Rector Prof. Dr. Paul Szilágyi and my personal liaison person and interpreter Dr. Erika Tamási. Later on in the evening we were also joined by several arriving members of the ARACIS team. The evening gave an excellent opportunity to discuss the main tasks of the evaluation visit with the institutions' leadership and to get to know each other.

The official part of the visit began on Wednesday, April 14, with a technical meeting of the complete ARACIS evaluation team followed by a first meeting with representatives of all locations of Sapientia University. In his opening address the ARACIS Mission Coordinator Prof. Dr. Antal Lukacs introduced the team and explained briefly the evaluation procedure. Afterwards the Rector gave a power point presentation of Sapientia University and its three locations. The SER was summarized and some additional explanations and facts were given.

In the following three days I had the opportunity to visit all locations of the University. On Wednesday, April 14, before noon I went with my interpreter Dr. Tamási by a University car from Cluj-Napoca to the campus in Târgo-Mureş. As we arrived before the other team members I took the opportunity to talk to the local Dean Prof. Dr. Iuliu Szégely, made a short tour through this interesting University building and attended a class of numerical mathematics.

Before we travelled to the third University location in Miercurea-Ciuc I used a chance to talk to a small group of students gathering for a meeting with the ARACIS team scheduled for the later afternoon. The more private atmosphere with a smaller group of students - in the later meeting with the ARACIS team attended more than 70 students - without the presence of any University teachers allowed a very open and frank discussion. Students stated to be satisfied with their study programmes. The evaluations of courses by students were taken seriously by the University. Excellent contacts with teachers and their open intercourse with students were mentioned several times. For some students this close contact between students and teachers was the main reason to choose Sapientia University for their higher education, despite the disadvantage to study at a non-accredited institution. Similar to my experiences at other Romanian universities students would like to strengthen practical parts in their curricula, to increase student mobility and reduce student work load in undergraduate programmes.

About 8 pm I arrived together with Dr. Tamási at Miercurea-Ciuc. The Dean Prof. Dr. Zoltá Makó welcomed us and arranged a short tour through the building, a former hotel (main lecture room, student dormitories etc.). About 9 pm we joined the ARACIS group studying the finances and study programmes of the Miercurea-Ciuc campus. We had dinner together at the local University cafeteria. The other part of the ARACIS team from Târgo-Mureş only arrived after midnight.

On the morning of April 15 Scientific Research Director Prof. Zoltán Kása welcomed the ARACIS team in Miercurea-Ciuc and gave a short presentation of the campus. Then the mayor of Târgo-Mureş, Mr. Ráduly Róbert Kálmán gave a welcome address. After a short technical meeting of the ARACIS team on the further schedule of the visit followed a comprehensive tour visiting lecture halls, an English class and a computer science class, the library, a TV-studio, laboratories, research installations, the rooms of the administration and the student representatives, the cafeteria etc. A visit to the pilgrim church of Symbuleu Ciuc and the Millenniumi Templon in Miercurea-Ciuc concluded the visit to this University location. After lunch we left to Târgo-Mureş.

In Târgo-Mureş I was welcomed by the Rector and the ARACIS Mission Director who had arrived in the meantime and from now on joined the team.

At the meeting with graduates at 4:30 pm more than 70 former students of Sapientia University from all three locations participated. The general respond was very positive. All graduates would choose this University again for their higher education. They have still strong connections with the institution and co-operate with the University working in joint projects. Several participants mentioned a slight deficit with respect to practical

education and international experiences. They had to gain these abilities with their first jobs. Some graduates assumed that the change to Bologna might have increased theoretical education and neglected practical experiences. The graduates stated unanimously that they had no problems or discrimination on the Romanian labour market being graduates from an institution with Hungarian teaching language.

A similar picture on the institution was expressed by the more than 30 employers attending the next meeting. The technical, social and personal competences of the graduates were highly appreciated. All employers praised the creativity and communication abilities of the students of Sapientia University. Asked for one wish for a change it was mentioned that theoretical education was very good but practice should be increased. Somebody else would like to strengthen foreign language skills of students.

In the late evening we returned by car to Cluj-Napoca.

In the morning of Friday, April 16, I visited together with Dr. Tamási the Faculty building in Cluj-Napoca. We were friendly welcomed by Dean Prof. Dr. Márton Tonk. I had the opportunity to attend a class learning how to handle a heavy film camera and to watch several awarded short film productions. A very interesting conversation with a professor who is a specialist on volcanic eruptions - a very actual subject - concluded this visit.

After my return to the rectorate building in Cluj-Napoca the whole ARACIS team assembled at 11:30 am and reported in front of the Mission Director and representatives of the University on their findings and impressions. In general there were very positive statements with some minor suggestions for changes. At the end of the meeting about 12:30 pm the Rector thanked the whole team and expressed his hope for an accreditation of the institution.

4. Observations and Comments

4.1 Institution

The rectorate of Sapientia University in Cluj-Napoca has clear visions of the future and has found an efficient way how to lead this complex institution. The three separated study centres situated rather far from each other are certainly not easy to manage, but I have not found any mayor problems caused by the remoted locations.

In the study centres of Cluj-Napoca, Miercurea Ciuc and Târgo-Mureş I have met highly committed and professional Deans and Faculty leaders. My impression is that all four Faculties are managed very well.

The new University building in Târgo-Mureş provides excellent facilities and is also of high architectural interest. The existing extension project for the campus is convincing.

The situation in the study centre in Miercurea Ciuc is similar. The building has been adapted well for the purposes of the University. There are certainly some disadvantages compared with the new University building in Târgo-Mureş, but the location in the centre of the city and a more or less unique selling position as qualified higher education institution in Miercurea Ciuc open also a big chance.

The future of the study centre in Cluj-Napoca depends on the student numbers. A new building is projected. The Film and Media Studies are already internationally recognized. I can also see a future for the studies Environmental Science and International Relations/European Studies, especially if the University will be accredited. These programmes should attract also students from outside the region. For this purpose I recommend to teach at least some courses in Cluj-Napoca in English language too.

Quality assurance is a topic within the institution. But further steps and concrete actions in order to guarantee quality of teaching and research have to be taken.

4.2 Teaching

All study programmes of Sapientia University have been changed to the three cycle Bologna system being offered now as 6-semester undergraduate programmes. The quality of the courses is generally recognized by employers and graduates. Students and teachers are well motivated. The attended mathematics class in Târgo-Mureş - the teacher was not informed in advance - was of international standard. The teacher managed to include his 20 students into the learning process by asking questions and giving comments on the students' answers.

Nevertheless there are some things which could be improved: With respect to the great diversity of study programmes I suggest a concentration of undergraduate programmes on fewer but broader programmes after accreditation. Diversity and specializations can be introduced then by Master programmes. Probably the University could make some more use of existing synergies especially between Miercurea Ciuc and Târgo-Mureş.

Student load in classes is high. There is only little time for autonomous student work and self learning units. Students, graduates and employers mention that the curricula should pay more attention to practical work. Some of the employers plead to strengthen foreign language skills.

In summary, I have a good impression of teaching at Sapientia University. But the institution should work on the problems mentioned above. With respect to internationalization and language skills I recommend to offer some classes taught in English in all careers.

4.3 Research

As a special regional institution teaching in Hungarian language Sapientia University has to comply with demands of the Hungarian minority in Romania as well as to follow interests of the Romanian society and the European lines. Up to now there seems not to exist a total clear research policy. The University has already enforced certain research areas such as social sciences, biotechnology and environmental protection. But as a small institution the University has to establish also research co-operations for other fields in order to base its teaching on research. Internationalization of research and interdisciplinary research should be strengthened.

The policy to pay higher salaries to young staff members and attract by this very active

and ambitious young people seems to work very well. Nevertheless, young teaching staff should be supported by financial support for participation in national and international conferences or involvement in research collaborations.

5. Final Remarks

Sapientia University is a small institution within a difficult framework. I started this visit from a critical position, because I suspected a possible lowering of quality in order to attract students. The partition of the University into three separated locations relatively far from each other constitutes another handicap.

But after visiting the institution I have to state that Sapientia University works on a European university level. The buildings and the installations are very good, especially the campus in Târgo-Mureş. As competition in quality particularly by the well-known Babes-Bolyai University is high, Sapientia University has to offer programmes of a good standard. By my opinion some of Sapientia's study programmes can be ranked even in the top class. I have not found any evidence for irregularities such as the corruption problem mentioned in the Capital/Kienbaum paper on the Romania University Ranking of September 2009. The University plays an important role for the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. The relations of the institution with public and private organisations in the region are very good. From my point of view I cannot see an obstacle against accreditation of Sapientia University. Some of the actual problem zones of the institution will be considerably improved being accredited. So internationalization, mobility, research co-operation will be facilitated. This will open the chance to the institution to sharpen its profile in teaching and research as well as to strengthen co-operations with other higher education institutions.

Up to now Sapientia University has handled very well the governance of its three different campuses. I have found very independent Faculties at one hand, but a strong corporate identity of the University and a very effective and highly committed University leadership on the other hand. In summary, I support the accreditation of the institution because it is developing well and seems to be a promising young university.

6. Appendix: Remarks on the ARACIS Approach

The ARACIS external institutional evaluation and accreditation procedure is an important step for quality assurance in higher education in Romania. The fact that institutions are aware that they can be evaluated makes them respecting regulations and legislation and looking for quality in their programmes. Nevertheless, as I have stated already in other reports, bureaucracy should be reduced in future evaluation rounds and the institution itself should be more in the centre of the review. Many formal checks could be done before the visit to the institution in order to have more time for meetings and interviews during the visit. In order to start work in a more efficient way I suggest including an

internal briefing of the ARACIS team before the first official meeting with the rectorate into the evaluation schedule. This briefing should serve to get to know each other in the team and to exchange first impressions and opinions on the institution and the SER. I also plead for smaller interview groups during the evaluation in order to enable more essential and frank discussions. The evaluated institutions should be encouraged to include a swat analysis on their strengths and weaknesses into the SER. For a second evaluation of an institution the whole evaluation procedure should be more future-oriented instead of checking mainly the past. During evaluations the institutions should make more use of the unique opportunity to have several very experienced peers at hand to discuss with them future steps and developments for improvement.

Summing-up it must be said the even the actual ARACIS evaluations are very well organized procedures which provide an excellent service for the Romanian higher education area. I congratulate the Agency for its superior activities.

Klagenfurt, 28/04/2010

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