

**ION MINCU UNIVERSITY OF ARCHITECTURE AND
URBANISM
BUCHAREST
EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT
2017**



Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism (UAUIM) as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 3 May and Friday 5 May 2017. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of UAUIM focusing on the main points of improvement of quality and future development aspects with outlining the main dimensions of present and future challenges of the university. Before the three day long visit I received the self-evaluation report of UAUIM from ARACIS. During my stay in Bucharest with the help of the colleagues of the university I had the possibility to insight all the documentations and annexes of the evaluation process and to collect information about the operation of the UAUIM. My report is roughly following the structure of the self evaluation report of the institution.

Background

Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism (UAUIM) is the country's oldest and major academic institution dedicated to train specialists in both architecture and urbanism. The predecessor of the present university was set up in 1882 as the School of Architecture by the Society of Romanian Architects. Although the educational programs have remained and developed permanently, the institution had a relatively "stormy" history with several merge, division, remove, incorporation, periods of independence and dependence in the last century. Finally, in 1952, the Institute of Architecture was formed, and in the next decades, the institution strengthened its institutional, educational and administrative structures. In 2000, the institution changed of its name to the University of

Architecture and Urbanism and later, Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism. The present university has three faculties (Faculty of Architecture, Faculty of Urbanism, and Faculty of Interior Design) with BA and MA study programs, undivided programs and two doctoral schools (Doctoral School of Space, Image, Text, Territory; Doctoral School of Urbanism). In the 2015-2016 academic year, the total number of registered students was 2,845, of which 2714 in the Bologna cycle I and II, 131 doctoral students (Bologna cycle III).

With its old traditions UAUIM has a significant role in Romania. This long history through time, changing socio-economic systems, restructuring processes and transformations is a permanent evolution of educational programs have resulted educational programs that meet the needs of the students. As one of the leader universities in Romanian higher education this institution has been attractive for those who wanted to get knowledge, skills and competencies in the field of architecture and urbanism at high standards. Of course there are other institutions, faculties offering educational programs on the field of architecture and urbanism in the country, but it is important to note that this university is the only higher education institution in Romania that operates as an independent university on this field. The tradition, the experience, the prestige and the competences of UAUIM show the importance of this institution in the internal and international environment and also support and develop scientific research activities both national and international level. On the whole the institution meets the cultural, social and economic needs of the community. According to the self-evaluation report of the UAUIM the strategic objectives focusing on the maintenance of the present position and provide future development to be considered as one of prestigious universities in Central-Eastern Europe.

Legal and Organizational Framework, Missions and Objectives

The Charter of Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism is the basic document that provides the guidelines regarding the structure, strategy, and principles of functioning, development and regulations. The charter provisions have been harmonized with both the Romanian legislation and the principles of the European Space of Higher

Education. It has also introduced some elements belonging to the consistent tradition of architectural education from Romania. According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of UAUIM have the appropriate competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures of the three faculties of the university, departments, centers and other organizational units of the institution have a transparent, logical structure and they are suited for the correct management of the organization. The operation of the institution relies on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation of different types of programs, teaching staff and the other personnel of the university. The web page of the university features the organizational structure, the managerial team, as well as the offices and services available in the university.

According to the self-evaluation report and the annexes of the university, parallel with its didactic, cultural and scientific missions, the main mission of the university is focusing on to train professionals in the fields of architecture, urban planning, landscape architecture, interior design, product design, conservation and restoration of architectural monuments. Beside these aims, it is also an important priority to promote the freedom of artistic expression, critical thinking, and strengthen national cultural identity and keep the leading role within the Romanian and European architectural education on a long term. The institution also has a code of academic ethics and integrity through which it defends the values of academic freedom, academic self-government and ethical integrity. The university has a strategic plan for the next years (2016-2020); the annual plans are based on this plan.

On the whole, from the beginning the university has the mission of carrying on specific higher education activities in the fields of architecture and urbanism, having the purpose of training highly-skilled specialists, developing and improving professional competences, improving constantly the education process and scientific research, in permanent cooperation with similar institutions, as well as with institutions from the national, European and international environment.

Visibility

UAUIM permanently tries to reflect for the needs of social and economic demand. To reach this aim the university has close connections with different professional bodies like the Chamber of Romanian Architects, the Union of Romanian Architects, Register of Romanian Urbanists, and Society of Architects Specialized in Interior Design. The university has a strong contribution to the design of key projects for modern constructions within Romania. The Center for Research, Design, Expertise, and Consulting has carried out several significant architectural projects in the last years (the National Library, the National Stadium), urban planning projects (Master Plans for the major cities, including the on-going Master Plan of Bucharest, development strategies, territory planning projects, etc.), projects in the field of restoration of historic monuments, and at the same time it has offered advisory services.

It is also remarkable that faculty members have been appointed in various approval commissions (Ministry of Development), in the technical urban planning commissions in Bucharest and in other cities, holding key positions in professional and scientific commissions (National Commission for Historic Monuments, ICOMOS). Likewise, the UAUIM has tight connections with the three architectural faculties from the country: Technical Universities of Iasi, Cluj, and Timisoara, collaborating with them on a regular basis in the fields of research, pedagogy and doctoral studies.

The university belongs in the larger community of architectural schools of the European Union and from other continents. UAUIM collaborates with more than 70 architectural schools from Europe, Asia, South America, and the United States. The university also plays an active role in ERASMUS and ERASMUS + programs help students and professors' exchanges in over 50 schools of architecture. Over the last four years, more than 200 students benefited from students' exchanges in the framework of various programs, attending partially or completely the educational process of those schools or participating in summer workshops. Equally, almost 20% of the University's faculty members benefited from teaching periods varying from two weeks to three months in schools of architecture from abroad.

UAUIM plays a very active part within the EAAE (European Association for Architectural Education), and currently participates in their conferences, organizes international competitions for students. Among others, the university has membership in the Convention of the Schools of Architecture and Urban Planning from South France and Eastern Europe; ELASA (European Association of Students in Landscape Architecture); IAESTE (International Association for Students' Practice Exchanges), our University being the founder of Romania's branch; the AESOP (Association of the Schools of Urban Planning in Europe); the European Association of Universities (IAU-UNESCO); ELIA (European League of Art Institutes); UNISCAPE (European Network of Universities to Implement the European Convention on Landscape).

International accreditation is also an important part of the activities of quality assurance, international visibility and recognition. UAUIM has been internationally recognized since the 1990s. Ministry of Culture from France has recognized UAUIM diplomas since middle of 1990s. The 6-year study program (B.A. + M. A.) of the Faculty of Architecture was successively evaluated by the specialists from RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) in 1998, 2001, 2007. The last evaluation confirmed the international validation of the Faculty of Architecture. In September 2008, the Faculty of Architecture was successfully evaluated by the Group of Expert Coordination for Professional Qualifications within the Commission for the Accreditation of Regulated Professions (architecture, medicine, legal profession) of the European Council, resulting in the recognition of the qualification and free circulation of its graduates in Europe.

Educational Programs, Teaching Staff

Starting with the 2005-2006 academic year, the UAUIM uses the European Credit Transfer System. The university has 3 faculties and offering educational programs at BA, MA and doctoral level. BA and MA programs are coordinated by the Faculties; the 3rd level academic studies are coordinated by the Department for Advanced Studies.

Faculty of Architecture has the next educational programs:

- Architecture – integrated Bachelor's and Master's degree (without intermediate qualification award), 6 years, 360 ECTS credits
- Architectural Conservation and Restoration – Bachelor's degree, 3 years, 180 ECTS Credits (in Sibiu)

According to the number of students in the 2015/2016 school year, 70% of students of the university are attending the educational programs of the faculty, where the 6-year long Architecture educational program is dominant with its 1860 students. If we follow the trends of the past 5 years, there is only a moderate decrease. More than 50% of the students pay for the educational program which certainly shows a relatively intensive and permanent interest in connection with architectural studies. The Architectural Conservation and Restoration Bachelor program is operating in Sibiu and the present number of students shows that this number is 50% less than it was in the 2011/2012 academic year, resulting smaller group of students (according to the data, the present number is 30), although this is a very interesting initiative of the university in a city where the built cultural heritage is very significant. The changes of the last years could result the revise of this program in the next years. Beside the successful and popular architectural educational program, these above mentioned processes result around 5% drop of the total number of students in the last 5 years.

Faculty of Interior Architecture offers 3 educational programs:

- Interior Architecture – integrated Bachelor's and Master's degree (without intermediate qualification award), 5 years, 300 ECTS credits
- Product Design – integrated Bachelor's and Master's degree (without intermediate qualification award), 5 years, 300 ECTS credits
- Furniture and Interior Design – Bachelor's degree, 3 years, 180 ECTS credits

According to the data, the present number of students is 424, which is about 10% less than the number of students in the 2011/2012 school year. Number of students at

Product design program is more or less at the same level in the last years although in the other programs there is a decrease, comparing with the 2011/2012 level. The most popular program is the Interior Architecture (263 students), the next one is Product design (with 110 students) and Furniture and Interior Design has 51 students in the 2015/2016 school year.

Faculty of Urbanism has 374 students. The faculty offers the following full-time study programs:

- Urban Design and Planning – Bachelor's degree, 4 years, 240 ECTS credits
- Landscape Design and Planning – Bachelor's degree, 4 years, 240 ECTS credits
- Urban Design – Master's degree, 2 years, 120 ECTS credits
- Urban Management for Competitive Cities – Master's degree, 2 years, 120 ECTS credits
- Landscape and Territory – Master's degree, 2 years, 120 ECTS credits
- Urban Mobility – Master's degree, 2 years, 120 ECTS credits
- Country Planning and Regional Development – Master's degree, 2 years, 120 ECTS credits

In both 2 BA programs there is a decrease in the last 5 years (25-28% drop), and there is also a 20% loss in the MA study programs as well. It certainly shows the changing student preferences as the reduction concerned mainly those students who paid taxes for the programs but the number of students on state-financed places have remained relatively stable. According to the annexes of the university the number of foreign students have decreased in the last 5 years (from 140 to 93), as well as the number of doctoral students (from 251 to 131).

In the 2015-2016 academic year, there were 2714 students and course participants enrolled in all study programs. The total, university level decrease in the number of students is almost 10% that does not seem to be significant but on the other hand, structurally there are relatively great challenges. It is still a relatively intensive interest in

architecture educational programs where there is a competition of 1.5 - 2 candidates per place, but on other programs the preferences have changed in the last few years and the number of students has started to decline.

These changes could have several reasons like certain effects of demographic changes, decreasing interest, worsening financial background of potential students, changing preferences of students, changing role of higher education, market competition, MA programs of other higher education institutions and so on. On one hand, lower number of students certainly could result better level of teaching with improving the quality of the educational processes and scientific research as long as the financial background is stable and the longer term financial sustainability of the institution is not in danger. It is important to point out that these changes also could affect wide range of management activities of UAUIM from human resources management to reengineering of the services related to the educational processes. It is important to emphasize that the management of the university is aware of these challenges and have started to make steps for consolidating the operation of the institution. These changes certainly affect the present number of employees parallel with the fact that the institution has to satisfy the needs of the education programs in an appropriate level.

The titular teaching staff in UAUIM has proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which results a good level of performance in education and training processes. According to the self-evaluation report of the institution and personal field experiences the scientific potential and quality of human resources of UAUIM are on a good level. University has now a highly qualified staff. Beyond the professional competences it is important to point out that foreign language skills of the staff are good.

At the beginning of the 2016-2017 academic year there were 249 professors on permanent tenure, of which 30 full-professors, 67 associate professors, 86 lecturers and 66 assistant professors. It is also important to add that the teaching staff from UAUIM enjoys a large national and international recognition and appreciation, which is also

leading to their presence in specialized bodies and committees in the country and abroad.

Material assets

The headquarters of the institution is at no. 18-20, Academiei Street, district 1, Bucharest, resulted from successive extensions of the initial wing built between 1916-1927 after Grigore Cerchez's design, and listed as an architectural monument (LHM – Bucharest Municipality, 2015). The other wings were built between 1960-1970. Their ensemble occupies the whole block bordered by Academiei, Edgar Quinet, and Biserica Enei Streets. All spaces for didactic activities are located on this premises (lecture and seminar rooms, architectural design studios, laboratories), the library, the gym with modern lockers, offices for the leadership of the UAUIM and the administration spaces, teachers' rooms, etc. On the ground floor of the building overlooking Academiei St. there is a large exhibition space, where key architecture and art exhibitions were mounted in the last 10-15 years. The total floor area is 27,068 sq. m. Besides the headquarters, the university also has other locations in Bucharest (student hostels, student facilities, other educational spaces). The university also holds a 30-year lease which allows the University to use the fortified church of Dealu Frumos (Sibiu County), a listed historic monument. Several didactic, professional, and cultural events take place there, such as international workshops and student camps. A video system for broadcasting lectures in real time has been achieved; it is mostly used for teachers delivering course for the students of Sibiu. The university has a library opened to students and faculty members from all education types. It is the oldest and most comprehensive library of this kind in the country. It was founded in 1912 from the donations of the schools' professors who wanted to offer their own books to the faculty and students. The library has two reading rooms, one for periodicals. To provide the necessary conditions for appropriate teaching and learning activities for the students registered in the Programs of Architectural Conservation and Restoration and Urbanism and Territory Administration in Sibiu, a branch of the UAUIM Library from Bucharest has been set up there.

“Ion Mincu” University Publishing House was established in 2001 according to a decision of the UAUIM Senate. The publishing house prints academic books, mainly course books, as well as books from broader areas of architecture and urbanism, authors’ books or translations. The UAUIM Museum is a public institution of culture that collects, preserves, researches, restores, communicates and mounts exhibitions with a view to educate the public and provide testimonies about the history and evolution of the architectural profession. The museum was set up in 1982. It exhibits representative artifacts and documents for the Romanian architectural education, other exhibits related to the development of architecture: scale models of famous monuments and buildings, parts of the ornaments and wrought-iron pieces saved from the demolitions during the 1980s.

In the basement of the main building, there is a restaurant for both students and professors, a stationery, a bookstore, and a copy center. The gym, recently refurbished and equipped is a venue for academic sport competitions. One of the main objectives is to finish the consolidation of the old wing, a listed historic monument, with a total built area of about 8,900 sq. m. Parallel with the reconstruction of student dormitories, and the garden as well.

The capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the existing regulations. On the other hand, the state of the buildings from the different periods are not at the same level. Although the rebuilding processes are permanent, university has to invest permanently to develop physical infrastructure. The present processes and plans seem to be promising, although it is clear that without outside resources it is not possible to implement everything. The university should apply for national and European funds to finish this work as soon as it is possible and it is also would be important to rethink the used spaces, relocate as much activities as possible to the headquarters of the university in order to rationalize more the operation of the institution. It is an essential aspect that student of the university could contribute these processes (on some fields involving

students has already started but there are many possibilities to use their knowledge, ideas and plans to make the university a perfect place for education).

Financial activity

As a nonprofit institution, the university is establishing funds for activity from the annual state finance, school tuition taxes, from donations and sponsorships and other incomes. According to the details and the consultations with the staff of the university the financial activities, incomes and expenses of UAUIM have certain challenges and the present university management has started to work on implementing changes. On one hand, this work takes time and management together with the other leaders of the university and the colleagues have to work together on implementation. It is very promising that the first steps have started to reduce expenses and increase own budget incomes.

Beside the state support the university has to find the ways to realize more own, extra budget incomes to maintain and finance its activities in a reasonable level and quality. Right now there are lots of signs of this change of way of thinking: there are plans to utilize the available resources and find also new directions to make extra money. Another way to keep the present financial situation relatively stable could be to realize more income from study fees with enrolling greater number of students for the present education programs or offering new, desirable programs which could attract more students. According to the received information, the present situation is a kind of turning point: the university has to make the first steps to make the system sustainable in the future. To reach these aims is an important challenge, just like everywhere in the Central Eastern European countries.

It is important to add that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. The good reputation of UAUIM attracts lot of potential students and the university also has good connections with the secondary education institutions and other private and state organizations and companies. There is also a financial assistance for students as granting of scholarships and other forms of financial supports. Every year the lists of

scholarship-aided students and fee-paying students are revised according to their grades from the previous year.

According to the data, the greatest expenditure is the personal cost and this has to be reduced in the next years to keep the financial sustainability and provide possibility to finance the other activities of the university at an appropriate level. As I mentioned earlier, the present management of the university has started to communicate the needed changes and the new strategic concept of the institution (this is the so called DELTA-model – Dialog, Efficiency, Legality, Transparency and Entrepreneurship). This new way of thinking certainly could help to stabilize the financial position of the institution, intensify marketing activities, revise the entrance exam procedure of the university, focus more on foreign students and reflect for the new needs of the students, parallel with rethinking the role of the Sibiu educational programs and offering other educational programs as well.

This new direction seems to be promising, but it is important to note that according to the logic of the strategic planning only the first part of the strategy exists: the university has correctly identified the most important elements of the past and present situation and challenges, right now the main aim is to have to identify the strategic steps of the next years and systematically work out that what the university has to do with accurately specifying the tasks and assigning the required human and financial resources in this turning point to reach a better level of performance in the future.

Students

According to the opinions of some colleagues from the university there is no need to get more students, because the present number of students is 'enough' to maintain the institution and quality of educational processes, but on the other hand if there is a possibility for growing with keeping an appropriate level of quality of the education programs it would be worth to expand the education services and activities of the university.

There is a large number of international cooperation with European, Asian and overseas universities and there are great numbers of bilateral agreements exists in UAUIM. The UAUIM is also participating in the ERASMUS program where parallel with the student mobility there is also teacher mobility in the university which usually means a one-week long period to different European destinations basically with the same main directions like student mobility. Although these connections are operating quite well, it is recommended to maintain and manage these contracts permanently with European and also with non-European universities and permanently increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities.

Traditionally the university organizes art and cultural events and programs, organizes contemporary art exhibitions in the halls and spaces of UAUIM. According to the received data dormitory buildings of the university offer good conditions of accommodation, and meet the needs of the students. The present capacities cover just a part of the total number of students but it seems to be enough as large number of students are from Bucharest or from the surrounding areas so they basically don't need this type of assistance of accommodation.

The public information can be found on the UAUIM site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including correct information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian and English language. There are also scholarships for students. There are social and cultural services provided by the University to its students, many cultural and professional initiatives have taken shape (reading groups, debates, film watching, Architectural Annuals, Biennials, Triennials etc.).

Some of the graduates at BA level chose to attend the MA programs of the UAUIM (it is not a challenge at the integrated 6-year architecture program). It would be important to attract more students to continue their studies instead of leaving the institution. Relationship with students is good, students are satisfied with the university.

Students' participation is intensive in international and national architectural competitions. There is also a Center for Counseling and Career Guidance (CCCG) in the university help students to find their place easier on labor market.

ARACIS team meeting with students, graduates and employers was a little bit different from the similar meetings of other evaluation processes as just a very few students, graduates and employers appeared, although the team has the possibility in a framework of a less formal dialog to get more personal information, opinions and attitudes. Some remarks:

- University could organize plenty of activities to help the students on the labor market but luck and incidences have also an important role;
- Generally speaking, the participants were satisfied with the university, educational programs;
- All of them think that new knowledge elements have to be implemented to the curricula and reflect the needs of the 21st century and these needs are certainly different very much from the traditional needs of the students and the traditional supply of a higher education institution (for example web design);
- Alumni activities of the Faculty of Architecture have to be expanded to university level;
- Besides the theoretical and 'artistic' contents students also need practical knowledge about the working mechanisms of economy, marketing, management, self-marketing, self-management – it is important to point out that this process has already started at the university;
- Sustainability questions related to the main fields of university are also important – these generations would be the generations that are going to meet with the economic, social and environmental challenges of humankind and in the field of architecture and design there are also many things to do.

During my visit I had the possibility to meet with some students of UAUIM and I found them very open minded, energetic and intelligent. They seem to be very loyal to their

university and pay a lot of attention to their studies. I have also experienced that the students I met speak very good English.

Research activities

UAUIM plays a very important role in scientific research, with promoting the enrichment of knowledge in different fields. The importance of research activities seems to be significant in the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. In UAUIM, just like everywhere in the European Union member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European resources, projects and funds become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities.

The UAUIM has established as strategic option the reconsideration of the research system to increase its international component and develop the research activity based on the use of knowledge in the social and economic environment with generating sustainable partnerships with other organizations from the academia and business network. There are three research centers that help these activities (Center for Research, Architectural Design, Expertizing and Consulting; Center for Studies in Vernacular Architecture; Center for Architectural and Urban Planning Studies). For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. In case of UAUIM these connections seem to be in a perfect level as national and international collaboration has been in focus from the beginning.

Research activities can be seen at institutional, individual as well as student level. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intense collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities and state institutions. Students are permanently participating on contests, exhibitions and conferences. Their ideas, knowledge and concepts should be an integral part of the repositioning process of the university.

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance and Assessment Commission - QAAC is the main body that through specific procedures based on the policy and objectives of the institution. The QAAC also assures both the observance of national regulations that are established for the field of education and accommodation of assurance quality in education with the UAUIM mission as it is defined in the Charter and at the same time with the international practice in the field.

Besides the representatives of the faculties, student representative, representative from the architects and urbanists' practice, a representative of the UAUIM graduates and a member from the Council of Scientific Research of the UAUIM are in the Commission. QAAC operationally coordinates all activities concerning educational quality – sometimes in partnership with other commissions and decision makers – and submits an annual Report on Quality to the UAUIM Senate. Reviewing the structure and activities of the commission, although QAAC seems to operate well, the main principle and an objective have to be that quality assurance become a part of the organizational culture of the institution. The evolution and development of a real organizational culture of quality assurance at every stage of university operation should be in focus. The nation-wide 'uniqueness' of the university (the only self-governing architecture and urbanism university, the oldest school of architecture and the most complex one at present) justifies the need for a set a real quality assurance while the institution permanently has to face with economic, social and environmental challenges, so there is a continuous adaptation pressure for quality assurance processes to adjust to the changes.

Conclusion

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have seen, what I have read and have heard before and during my visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. On the whole UAUIM meets the needs of educational and professional training specific standards, the social and economic development needs of the community and European standards of

education and scientific research as well. I recommend the level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- The university should pay enough attention to the permanent changes (number of students, financial stability, changing needs of the potential students, etc.) and has to make a real strategic plan that reflects the present challenges and draw up the main tasks for the next years;
- The university has to rethink the present educational supply and develop/reposition its educational offering;
- Parallel with traditional roles, the university has to adapt to the new needs of the students where permanent improvement of quality has to be in focus; keep in mind that adaptation needs flexibility and investment in human capital;
- University has to find its competitive factors with specialization and have define and find the role and the place in local and international market.
- UAUIM should continue to invest in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow.

Finally, I would like to thank to the Rector and all the University staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Bucharest. At last but not least I would like to thank to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

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