



ARACIS

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

External Institutional Evaluation

Universitatea Ecologică din București, România

Foreign Expert Report

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em.Univ.-Prof.Dr. Winfried Müller
Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Austria

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1. Introduction

This report summarizes my impressions as Foreign Expert from the visit to the Ecological University of Bucharest / Universitatea Ecologică din București (UEB) for an external institutional evaluation by ARACIS from October 18 to 20, 2017. Beside the institutional evaluation, the study programmes “Physical and Sports Education” and “Finance and Banking (full time and part time learning)” were elected for assessment too. This visit follows to the institutional evaluation of UEB by ARACIS in 2015.

During the last 17 years, I have participated already in nearly 50 evaluations of Higher Education Institutions in nine European countries, in Colombia and in Nigeria. Hence, the following observations and comments will not only reflect my experiences with UEB but also give international perspectives. My focus is on the institution as a whole and not so much on individual study programmes. The self-evaluation process, governance and quality assurance as well as international perspectives are important core elements of my considerations. The verification of the compatibility of the offered study programmes with the national Romanian regulations is left to the Romanian experts within the Team.

I am very grateful to the Mission Director Conf.univ.dr. Mădălin Bunoiu and the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof.univ.dr. Răzvan Nistor for conducting this evaluation process in a very efficient way and to all members of the ARACIS team for their constructive and fruitful discussions during the visit. My special thanks go to the Technical Secretary Mrs. Carmen Mirian from ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this interesting evaluation and for her friendly way of providing all necessary information.

I also give my cordial thanks to the Rector Conf.univ.dr. Giuliano Tevi, to the Prorectors Conf.univ.dr. Janina Mihăilă and Conf.univ.dr. Ciprian Alexandru, as well as to the President of the Senate Prof.univ.dr. Constantin Dănciulescu from UEB for the friendly welcome and the fruitful discussions during the visit.

Furthermore, I want to express my appreciation to the various persons including students, who have actively participated in the meetings during the visit.

2. Organisational Details of the Ecological University of Bucharest

The Ecological University of Bucharest was the first private university to be established in Romania after the 1989 revolution. The focus on ecology is in line with current demands of our society, through in the course of years UEB has been expanding to other areas with strong demands (Economy, Law, Psychology, Sports). Similar to other private universities UEB is strongly committed to teaching but also attempts to strengthen research within its limited framework. The University is not very large (about 4.000 students) and there exists a climate of close relationships and friendship between all university leaders.

The University is organised in seven faculties (Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Faculty of Ecology and Environmental Protection, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Psychology, Faculty of Communication Sciences, Faculty of Managerial and Environmental Engineering).

UEB has implemented the Bologna three cycle study structure. The 11 offered undergraduate studies are divided into six semesters for the Faculty of Ecology and Environmental Protection, the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, the Faculty of Psychology, the Faculty of Communication Sciences, and eight semesters for the Faculty of Law and Administration Sciences and the Faculty of Managerial and Environmental Engineering. Furthermore, UEB offers 22 Master programmes and several postgraduate training programmes.

In the academic year 2016/17 there were 3076 bachelor and 870 master students enrolled at UEB. The actual numbers for the academic year 2017/18 are slightly smaller.

In the current academic year, there exist 125 academic positions at UEB (29 professors, 35 associate professors, 59 lecturers, 2 assistants). Nearly everybody of the academic staff holds a PhD. The average ration of teachers and students is 1:32, but naturally differs from faculty to faculty. Some of the positions are currently vacant and substituted by other staff members and staff from other institutions.

UEB owns and manages two campuses, the campus in Bd. Vasile Milea with the Rectorate, the University administration and the majority of the installations of the faculties, and the campus in Franceză Street mainly with lecture rooms. According to the provided information and observations during the visit, the buildings and installations of UEB are well kept, but certainly need some renovation or refurbishment within the coming years.

The financial resources of the University do mainly come from tuition-fees of students. Despite of the difficult situation, the financial management of UEB operates very well. According to the provided information, the total revenue in 2016 was 13.332.004 Lei compared with total expenses of 10.080.706 Lei, what means that UEB had a saving of 3.251.298 Lei in 2016. About 40% of the revenue is spent for staff wages.

The University is governed by the Rectorate, the Senate and the Administrative Council. The Rectorate consist of the Rector and two Prorectors. The Senate has 35 members (26 academics and 9 students) and - according to the Law of National Education 2011 – has the task to monitor and control the activity of the executive management. The Administrative Council is formed by about 15 members, namely the Rector, the two Prorectors, the seven Deans, the head of the administration bodies and representatives of the owners of UEB (President of UEB).

3. Outline of the Visit

For a small institution such as UEB an institutional evaluation is a big challenge consuming considerable resources. For this, the institution should try to make as much profit as possible out of the procedure.

3.1 The Self-Evaluation Process

UEB has taken the evaluation process very seriously and has also set several steps of improvement during the last years considering the recommendations of the ARACIS evaluation 2015 and the institutional evaluation by the European University Association in 2013. The University has elaborated an informative Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of 54 pages describing the institution. However, as usual in Romania, the SER is not very self-critical and

problems are not really mentioned or discussed. The content is partially redundant and is not self-containing, that means, for nearly all important data and facts (budget, student numbers, staff numbers, etc.) one has to make a search in the Annexes or the UEB homepage. Moreover, the provided data is in many cases out of date because the SER was elaborated and approved by the Senate already one year ago.

3.2 The Evaluation Visit

The institutional evaluation visit to the Ecological University Bucharest began in the evening of October 17, 2017, with the arrival of the members of the ARACIS team coming from outside Bucharest at the Ibis Gara de Nord Hotel in Bucharest.

During the evaluation visit, I participated in the meetings of the main ARACIS team, but did also arrange my own interviews and examinations.

Wednesday, October 18

The official evaluation procedure started on October 18 at 9:00 am, in the Aula close to the Rector's office in Bd. Vasile Milea.

Rector Conf.univ.dr. Giuliano Tevi welcomed the ARACIS delegation and introduced the present representatives of UEB. Mission Director Conf.univ.dr. Mădălin Bunoiu and Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof.univ.dr. Răzvan Nistor presented the ARACIS team and explained the evaluation procedure. Rector Tevi promised his full support and cooperation for the evaluation visit.

In the course of the first day, the ARACIS team performed the usual activities. After a short internal ARACIS meeting in order to discuss the organisational details of the evaluation we visited for more than one hour the buildings and installations at the Vasile Milea Campus (rooms for administration, library, faculty buildings, lecture rooms, laboratories, computer rooms, sport facilities, etc.). We also met several on-going classes and observed staff and students during work.

In the late morning hours, I had private meetings with the Rector, with the Prorector for Research and International Affairs and with the President of the Senate.

During the early afternoon, I had a meeting with 12 English-speaking students. Afterwards I studied documents and had informative discussions with different members of the ARACIS team.

In the late afternoon, I attended the meetings of the ARACIS team with more than 100 students, with about 50 graduates and finally a meeting with 24 employers. Although these meetings with huge groups of students, graduates and employers usually do not disclose any severe problems, it is important within any evaluation procedure to meet students, graduates and employers. Perhaps the number of participants for these meetings could be more limited in order to facilitate discussion. As expected, students and graduates at UEB were commonly positive. Students know the evaluation of teaching and participate actively in the procedure. The only expressed wish by the students and graduates was for more praxis. In the meeting with the employers, some persons dominated the discussion presenting their own field of work and asking the University for a more specialized education of students for their area.

Thursday, October 19

In the course of the day, I studied diverse documents and interchanged opinions with other ARACIS members in order to complete my impression of the institution. At the internal ARACIS meeting in the evening, I gave a first short report on my observations and findings.

Friday, October 20

In the morning, all Team members finalised their documents. The evaluation visit ended with a meeting of the ARACIS team with the representatives of UEB (Rector, Prorectors, President of Senate, heads of administration) at 13:00 pm. The Mission Scientific Coordinator Conf.univ.dr. Răzvan Nistor summarised the impressions and results of the evaluation visit. In addition, the different ARACIS members presented their reports and findings. Rector Conf.univ.dr. Guliano Tevi thanked the ARACIS team for its careful work.

4. Governance and Institution

The leaders of UEB are highly committed to the institution. The University is well managed. There exists a climate of friendship between all university leaders. The governing bodies have developed a culture of consensus and co-operation without being caught by conflicts. However, the organisational structure of UEB is complex and there exist complicated decision processes. Similar to many other Romanian universities, also UEB has a favor for collective decisions and there exists a large amount of "homemade" bureaucracy. The Senate is very big and meets frequently. The distribution of duties and tasks between the Rector and the Senate is not very clear. According to the Law 2011 the Rector and the two Prorectors are fully responsible for the operational management of the institution and the Senate provides the legal framework and rules for the operational management. In this sense the Organisational Chart of UEB putting the Rector under the Senate does not correspond to the intentions of the Law 2011. By my understanding of the Law 2011, the Rector, Senate and Administrative Council should be on the same level. Furthermore, the Organisational Chart of UEB does not show all University bodies (e.g. President of UEB).

Currently UEB is a university in transition, which faces several challenges:

- Demographic changes creating intense competition for students and causing a critical financial situation
- Complex structure of UEB with very diverse study fields
- New legislation 2011
- Limited institutional autonomy
- Changes of the European Higher Education Area
(Bologna three cycle system, quality assurance, internationalisation, etc.)

In order to handle these challenges modern universities need efficient structures. The university management has to be able to react and to take fast decisions. In this sense a strong Rectorate is essential. But up to now UEB has only realized some minor cosmetic simplifications (e.g. reduction of the size of the Senate from 47 to 35 members) and not really carried out severe changes in order to implement an effective university structure and procedures. UEB is still a very complex institution (Senate with 35 members, 7 Faculties, big diversification of study programmes, many committees, complex and overlapping decision processes, etc.) and the Rector is limited by the President of UEB / Administrative Council and the Senate.

Last but not least I want to mention also in the case of UEB, that I have problems with the functioning of an ethic commission according to the Romanian legislation in a small institution, where everybody is related to everybody.

Recommendations:

- Define clear responsibilities between the President of UEB / Administrative Council, the Senate and the Rectorate giving the Rector and the Prorectors full responsibility for the operational management of the institution and the Senate the power for all strategic decisions and the definition of regulations in correspondence with the aims of the owners of UEB.
- Adapt and correct the Organisational Chart according to the Law 2011 and show all existing University bodies in the organigram.
- UEB has to be commended for its Strategic Plan 2016-2020. But benchmarks and performance indicators drawn from comparable institutions should be introduced into the Strategic Plan and monitoring instruments for the different tasks established.
- Further simplify UEB's structure and decision procedures
(For instance: Create a Faculty of Ecology and include the two Faculties related to this area. This would also strengthen UEB's brand to the outside. Reconsider the size of the Senate; avoid overlapping and redundant decision procedures, etc.).
- The existence of the Ethic Commission has to be commended. But as I have already mentioned on other occasions, especially at small institutions an ethic commission composed only by members from the institution will not be able to handle sensitive cases like corruption and academic misconduct. I strongly recommend to install – if necessary informally - an inter-university commission with half members coming from UEB and the other half from other universities.
- Try to sign mutual contracts of co-operation with public and private institutions in the region in order to increase income and to open new possibilities for projects and internships.

5. Quality Culture

There is a demand for quality at UEB, partially caused by the fact that the institution is attracting students by its good reputation in teaching and learning. The University has set up important activities and procedures for Quality Assurance (QA) during recent years. At central level there is a Prorector responsible for QA and the Senate has established a Commission for Assessment and QA. The Department of Assessment and QA works under the directives of the Prorector and the Senate's Commission. There exist subcommittees for QA at the Faculties and the Departments. Academic teachers report periodically on their teaching and research activities and are evaluated by students and colleagues. The students take an active part in the quality assurance procedures. But some university members (staff and students) still have little understanding of the purpose and benefits of QA.

Recommendations:

- In order to create a real climate of quality culture at UEB, promote the purpose and benefits of quality assurance procedures and shift from inspection and control to an improve-oriented approach providing support to staff and students.
- Use evaluation results for strategic decisions and make consequences public.

6. Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning is one of the strong points of UEB. The quality of the education at UEB was recognized in the meetings with employers, graduates and students. There were not disclosed any severe problems. However, students want more possibilities for practical work and the preparation of projects. Another complaint was the lack of positions for internships. There is no active student union at UEB. Some of the Bologna ideas such as student-centred learning are not really implemented. The involvement of stakeholders into curricula discussions seems to be very informal and only based on personal contacts.

Recommendations:

- Formalise the involvement of stakeholders in order to monitor and improve the quality of education.
- Further develop student-centred learning parts and other Bologna intentions within the curricula.
- Intensify and formalise contacts with local communities and enterprises in order to gain extra income and to provide more positions for internships for your students.
- The students of UEB have close connections to their teachers and do not feel the need for an active student union. Nevertheless, such an organisation would benefit the student community with respect to many aspects (promotion of common issues, contacts with the outside, etc.). Hence, motivate students to participate more actively in student self-organisation bodies.

7. Research and Service to Society

During the last years UEB has tried to increase research and to make its research activities nationally and internationally more visible. UEB has to be commended for its Scientific Research Strategy 2016-2020. There is a Prorector for research and the Senate has established a Scientific Research Commission. But the lack of resources and heavy teaching loads make it difficult for many staff members to pursue a more significant research activity. As already mentioned, the ecological focus of UEB is valuable and important for the society. Hence, this area could serve as starting point for interdisciplinary research and research co-operations with other institutions. Moreover, the ecological area could play an important role with respect to services to the society. Actually the connections of UEB with the outside are not very well developed and more or less based on individual initiatives.

Recommendations:

- Continue intentions to be internationally more visible and better known (e.g. participation in international events, publication in international recognised journals).
- Further strengthen and expand applied research and consultancies especially in the focus area ecology.

8. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a multi-dimensional task taking into account mobility programmes, language policy, curricula, joint study and double degree programmes, collaborative research,

conference attendance, etc. Despite of all existing restrictions at a small private university UEB could strengthen its activities with respect to many of these tasks without spending additional resources. Up to now, there are not many agreements with institutions abroad. Especially the students want to have a bigger choice of Erasmus destinations and to expand the Erasmus destinations to more attractive countries.

Recommendations:

- Define clear goals for internationalisation (strategic partnerships, language policy, mobility, research collaborations).
- Start with internationalisation at home by offering courses given in English language at all Faculties.
- Try to attract international students by the ecological focus of UEB.
- Establish at least a part of UEB's homepage in English.
- Update regularly the information in the homepage.

9. Final Remarks

By its profile, UEB is an interesting institution, having a strong leadership, highly motivated and qualified academic and administrative staff, and interested students. UEB's focus in ecology and its other disciplines open excellent possibilities to become a nationally and internationally recognised institution. However, in order to master the actual and future challenges UEB has to leave its old structures and to turn to a modern higher education institution with a strong and active university management, an efficient organisational structure and fast decision procedures. I am confident that the strongly committed leadership of UEB will take the necessary steps for a successful future of the institution. Just trust the very committed Rector and his team and let them go ahead.



em.Univ.-Prof.Dr. Winfried Müller

