

Prof. Jean-Michel EYMERI-DOUZANS
Exceptional Class Professor
Vice-Rector of Sciences Po Toulouse for international relations
President of the European Group for Public Administration (Brussels)

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Evaluation report of the PhD School of Public Administration of the Babes-Bolyai University International expert

The undersigned international expert took part into the preliminary plenary meetings organized online by the ARACIS team:

- on October 12th 2021, Meeting of the evaluation team for discussing main methodological aspects related to the evaluation of doctoral studies;
- on Tuesday 2nd November 2021, the series of kick-off one presided over by Prof. Simona Lache: on-line preliminary meeting for the preparation and harmonization of evaluation steps, in hybrid mode, of doctoral study domain and IOSUD; on-line meeting with the representatives of the institutions and of the Council for Academic Doctoral Studies (CSUD);

These plenary meetings were very helpful to us all providing us with an in-depth understanding of the way PhD doctoral school are organized in Romania.

On Tuesday 2nd November 2021 afternoon, the evaluation panel dedicated to assessing Babes-Bolyai University Doctoral School in Public Administration presided by professor Marius Profiroiu and to which the undersigned expert belongs, started its meetings with the colleagues from Cluj.

1. The first on-line meeting was with the contact person for the doctoral study domain under review and the team responsible for drafting the self-evaluation report of the PA doctoral school. Our main interlocutors were Professors Catalin Baba, Dean Calin Hintea and vice-dean Bogdana Neamtu. The gave us a very precise overview of the organization and functioning of their doctoral school funded a few years ago, but which enrolls already more than 50 PhD students supervised by 9 PhD coordinators.

The PA doctoral school operated in relative autonomy from Babes-Bolyai University and, according to the specific regulation applying in the region, operate their masters and post-doctoral studies in three languages (Romanian, German, Hungarian).

The PA doctoral school has a deliberative cross-discipline approaches to Public Administration considered as a field of related disciplines, from finance and management to political science and organizational theory, well in line with the common understanding promoted within NISPAcee and EGPA. The team in Cluj is extremely well connected with these two European learned societies.

The PA doctoral school works seamlessly with the Transilvanian Review of Administrative Sciences (RTSA) which is the only ISI classified Romanian review in the field.

2. The second on-line meeting was with the 9 faculty members of the PA doctoral school who are habilitated to coordinate PhD research. The topics under discussion were the high number of PhD students per mentor and the difficulties for the colleagues to handle in some cases more than 10 PhD students concomitantly. We also surveyed the various backgrounds of the PhD students and their professional perspectives. This gave room to fruitful discussions on the dominant conception of what is a PhD, its meaning and purpose among the Romanian academia and in the eyes of the Romanian Ministry for Education. The colleagues in Cluj made it very clear that they are not favourable to a massification of doctoral studies which would lead, sooner or later, to lowering the value of the PhD.
3. The third meeting of the afternoon was with a cluster of employers of PhD graduates from the PA Doctoral School. Our interlocutors expressed their very positive assessment of the intellectual quality and professionalism of the graduates. These employers were both from the public and the private sectors. The quality of the students and the diversity of the curricula make these graduates attractive talents who are “hunted” by private business and consultancies which tend to offer them starting salaries and rewards packages highly superior to what the public sector, that is the state and local administration, are allowed to offer.
4. The next meeting took place on Wednesday, November the 3rd, with 17 current PhD students. Interestingly enough, we observed that 12 of them were women. Their educational backgrounds and ages are diverse. Several among them are not students, but already civil servants. The interaction with the evaluation team was dynamic and authentic, the undersigned expert addressed them several questions on the average length of the doctoral studies until completion, on the number of seminars they give per week, on their participation in research projects and collective publications. On all these topics, they gave precise and interesting answers. They also assessed positively the activity and the flexibility of their supervisors to their demands. The quality of the feedback from the supervisors in the doctoral school is indeed high. In addition, the PhD students insisted on the great quality of the access to the faculty resources, facilities, library, on-line documentation in international data-bases, both on-site and from home. The doctoral school also subsidizes them in order to attend international conferences and seminars in a satisfactory manner.
5. Next on Wednesday, November the 3rd, we met with 6 PhD graduates of the PA doctoral school. The two main topics addressed were, on the one hand, the value of the PhD title in the Romanian society and actual usefulness, and, on the other hand, their suggestions for improving the doctoral training in Cluj. The lively discussion gave us a clear view of the employability of the PhD graduates, it also showed that, even if they left the University, their interest in teaching and research remains high in any cases. As regards to possible improvements, our interlocutors suggested that the doctoral school should invest in acquiring data processing licenses in addition to SPSS and to teach students more methodologies of statistical analysis of data since quantitative approaches are mainstream.

On Wednesday, November the 3rd afternoon, the evaluation team travelled to Cluj. The on-site visit took place on November the 4th, in the premises of the Doctoral school almost empty of students due to the legal restrictions related to the Covid19 restriction. However, the visit allowed the evaluators to verify on-site the educational infrastructure. Located in two separated but rather closed buildings, the school has enough space both for teaching and research: each academic and PhD student has his/her office and computer. The library is impressively well furnished. In addition, classrooms which are already well equipped are currently undergoing a complete reorganization financed by Sykes Co. which creates fully connected and interactive ecosystems in order to integrate students' smartphones and other terminal into the pedagogic interaction.

Moreover, the future development of the faculty and of the Doctoral school appears to be on very good tracks with a project of acquiring a hotel with a vast garden, situated precisely in between the two building the school already possess.

As for this project as well as for already and successful achieved ones, it is worth mentioning the strong connections of the faculty with the Municipality of Cluj and the support they enjoy from the local authorities.

In total, the on-site visit gave us a positive impression which confirmed the assessment done on the basis of the documents provided ex-ante by a team of colleagues who undoubtedly succeed in building a resilient intuition, well integrated into the educational ecosystem, local, national and international.