



**RE-ACCREDITATION OF  
CENTRE FOR CROATIAN STUDIES**

**Date of the site visit:  
17-18/3/2014**

**April, 2014**

## **COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERT PANEL**

- Prof. Dr. Bernhard Hommel (University of Leiden, Netherlands), chair
- Prof. Eugenio Biagini (Cambridge University, United Kingdom)
- Prof. Peter Lautner (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary)
- Prof. Monika Metykova (University of Sussex, United Kingdom)
- Katja Bilić (University of Rijeka, Croatia), student

Expert Panel was supported by:

- Irena Petrušić, Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia
- Ivan Bišćan, Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia

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# INTRODUCTION

## *Short description of the evaluated institution*

NAME OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Center for Croatian Studies of the University of Zagreb

ADDRESS: University Campus Borongaj, Borongajska cesta 83d, Zagreb

NAME OF THE HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Professor Josip Talanga, PhD

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE:

Scientific-educational Council, Board, Administration, Department of Philosophy, Department of Communication Studies, Department of Croatian Latinity, Department of Croatology, Department of History, Department of Sociology, Department of Psychology, Department of Educational Sciences and Teacher Education and The Secretariat

### LIST OF STUDY PROGRAMMES:

Undergraduate university study programmes:

- Philosophy (double major)
- Communication Studies (single major and double major)
- Croatology (single major and double major)
- History (single major and double major)
- Psychology (single major)
- Sociology (single major and double major)
- Philosophy and Latin (along with the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy)
- Philosophy (single major) (at the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy)
- Philosophy and Religion Sciences (at the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy)

Graduate studies:

- Philosophy (single major); research-oriented or teaching-oriented
- Communication Studies (single major); research-oriented
- Croatian Latinity
- Croatology (single major); research-oriented or teaching-oriented
- History (single major); research-oriented or teaching-oriented
- Psychology (single major); research-oriented
- Sociology (single major); research-oriented or teaching-oriented
- Philosophy (at the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy)
- Religion Sciences (at the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy)

Postgraduate university studies:

- Philosophy
- Croatology
- History
- Philosophy (at the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy)
- Religion Sciences (at the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy)

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 1501

NUMBER OF TEACHERS: 73

NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS: 46

TOTAL BUDGET (in kunas): 24 740 861

MSES FUNDING (percentage): 84

OWN FUNDING (percentage): 16

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:

According to the Statute of the University of Zagreb from 25 February 2005, the Centre for Croatian Studies has the status of a research and teaching constituent of the University that organizes and conducts research, teaching and professional activities, and coordinates such activities within the University. All the study programmes have been continuously implemented since their introduction. Apart from its faculty, the Centre for Croatian Studies seeks to engage leading Croatian experts in their fields as external teaching associates for its study programmes, and for that purpose they are elected into nominal scientific-educational titles. Thus the Centre maintains high quality of its study programmes. The initial problems with facilities have been largely resolved by moving to the University campus Borongaj in 2007, where the Eastern Campus of the University of Zagreb will be built. The Centre for Croatian Studies is involved in planning of the Eastern Campus and actively participates in the preparation of the documentation required for the project. The Centre for Croatian Studies has been operating for 21 years. During the establishment of the Centre, the University authorities carried out the policy of employing external teaching associates from the University constituents and public research institutes. The first teachers were hired only five years after the founding of the Croatian Studies, that is in 1997. Since this concept of operation began to pose increasing problems for the functioning of the Centre, in 1998 the Regulations on the internal structure and classification of positions were adopted, allowing employment of full-time teachers. However, this process has been slow. In early 2000, there was an attempt to address this issue through cumulative employment (e.g. 50% at another constituent of the University or research institute and 50% at the Centre), but this attempt failed. Following this, the hiring of teachers in full-time employment began, but went at a slow pace, insufficiently to cater for all the Centre's needs. The main cause of slow full-time employment was the unresolved issue of the facilities and the legal-formal status of the institution within the University of Zagreb. Not until 2004 was a more serious approach taken to the employment of teachers, especially assistants and junior research assistants. Hiring external teaching associates has a number of advantages, primarily the fact that it allows part-time employment of expertly qualified teachers in particular fields and the fact that this type of engagement was significantly cheaper for the Centre. Thus a number of experts and academics from various institutions have been engaged to teach individual courses in the previous period. In most cases they taught classes within a single course. However, the downside of this arrangement is that the number of teachers is thus inflating and the ratio between full-time employees and part-time external associates becomes disproportional.

## ***The work of the Expert Panel***

For its work the Panel drew upon the Self-Evaluation Report, prepared by the Centre for Croatian Studies of the University of Zagreb. A site visit was carried out on March 17 and 18. During the visit to the Centre the Expert Panel held meetings with the representatives of the following groups:

- The Management;
- The Working Group that compiled the Self-Evaluation;
- The students and students' representatives
- The Commissioner for study programmes and students, heads of departments, representatives of external associates and teachers;
- Teaching assistants , junior researchers and teaching fellows
- The Commissioner for research, international and institutional relations, coordinator and officer for international relations
- Research projects' leaders;
- Administrative staff;

The Expert Panel also had a tour of the library, IT rooms, student register desk and the classrooms at the Centre for Croatian Studies, where they held a brief question and answer session with the students and staff who were present.

# DETAILED ANALYSIS BASED ON STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR RE-ACCREDITATION

## ***1. Institutional management and quality assurance***

The HEI has developed a very (if not overly) detailed strategic plan that takes into account previous recommendations. Several weaknesses have been properly identified (such as the lack of sufficient productivity) and procedures have been implemented to tackle them. The organizational structure is very clear and appropriate (1.2) and effective mechanisms for monitoring and improving the teaching quality (1.6) and unethical behavior (1.8) are in place. Procedures to monitor quality in general are in place as well (1.5) but it is not yet entirely clear how effective they will turn out to be. This is particularly true for the monitoring of research quality (1.7).

Research productivity is low, perhaps not so much by Croatian, but certainly by European standards—and increasing both output and its quality will be decisive in building a recognizable research profile and attracting European grants. The Panel was not entirely convinced that this particular issue has received sufficient attention, even though functional mechanisms are available to improve productivity.

The Panel identified two further, partially related weaknesses. One relates to the strategic plan (1.1/1.4), which is very detailed with respect to particular measures but not very clear with respect to the general vision of the Institute. The other has to do with the (related) question of how the Institute relates to the Humanities Faculty of the University of Zagreb, which has study and research programs that highly overlap with those of the Centre for Croatian Studies (CCS). Sometimes the difference seems more in terms of content (such as in psychology with a strong emphasis on clinical issues, though without proper laboratory and equipment), but sometimes it refers to method as well (such as in philosophy, which is mostly analytic in the CCS).

The management of the CCS follows an expansion policy to attract as many students as possible. For that purpose, it continuously broadens scope and number of the study programs—as visible in the recent emphasis on psychology and the cognitive neurosciences. While that generates income, it has blurred the profile of the Institute, which is no longer recognizable. The management and parts of the staff have convincingly argued that they profile that is restricted to, or derived from a focus on Croatia (as the name CCS suggests) is not sufficiently attractive and no longer covers the majority of teaching and research activities. Although it was not within the remit of the Panel to address this issue, it was worried that the Institute has not yet managed to develop a new, alternative focus. As a consequence, it is not very clear for students, other faculties of the University, and the international research community what the CCS stands for and what its main teaching and research competence might be. This will make it extremely hard to stimulate international research collaborations on a larger scale and to attract international funding.

The lack of a recognizable focus also makes it difficult to define/redefine the relationship between CCS and the Humanities Faculty of the University of Zagreb. The overlap in study programs and research interests is substantial, but there is very little progress in the negotiation between the Institute and the University to align the mutual interests. The particular problem of the CCS is that it does not (yet) have the status as a faculty, which severely limits the autonomy of the CCS and its political/decision-making action radius. At the same time, the University seems to be unwilling to fill that decision-making vacuum and take full responsibility for the development of the Institute. It is difficult to see that the remaining problems can be solved to a satisfactory degree as long as this issue is not settled.

## **2. Study programmes**

The study programs are very well organized and run very well. The enrollment quota is perfectly in line with institutional resources and pass rates (2.3), assessment and workload seem perfectly appropriate (2.5/2.6), quality and teaching methods are modern and at international standards (2.7/2.8), supplemental resources are available and very satisfying (2.9) (even though the purchase of J-Store is recommended), and students have ample opportunities to apply their knowledge in practical fields (2.10). Particularly important for the latter are all the many external teachers, who are very useful and effective bridges to various other institutes and companies.

While CCS has developed procedures for monitoring the quality of study programmes that involve students, including questionnaires about every course (2.1), the Panel would recommend to develop ways in which students are advised on the outcomes of their feedback. In some cases external factors also have a decisive role in that, for instance the program of psychology must be approved by the Croatian Psychological Chamber, which follows the requirement of an European diplom.

The Panel did not find evidence of societal needs being considered when setting enrolment quotas (2.2), however, the Panel understands that this may be a larger issue that applies to the Croatian higher education system as such. As the high unemployment rate shows, many of the students must leave with insufficient skills for getting proper jobs, although this problem is not confined to the CCS.

While the Panel found that the learning outcomes were defined clearly (2.4), it would recommend to include more general intellectual and practical skills as well, particularly those that are important for future employment (e.g., presentation and communication skills, team work and similar). Moreover, in communication studies the lack of adequate facilities may hinder their completion.

## **3. Students**

Student affairs are very well organized, admission criteria and assessment procedures are systematically monitored and regularly updated (3.1/3.4). Extracurricular activities are supported in principle (3.2) but the few existing sport

facilities are in very bad condition and there are not many student events. To some degree, this reflects the fact that the campus is located far from the city center and not so easy to reach.

Less clear is the availability of, and the procedures for counseling and mentoring, even though the need for that has been identified (3.3). The HEI organizes career advice and helps in some practical matters (e.g., teaching how to write a CV). It also encourages the students to apply for Erasmus fellowships, though in psychology – because of the regulations of the Chamber – some students could not take up their studies abroad. It may be advantageous to invest even more into the organization of student support (mentoring, career advice and similar) on the campus to make it easily accessible rather than rely on the resources offered centrally by the university.

CCS did not keep systematic contact with former students in the past but plan to do so in the future (3.5). Some activities have been undertaken to inform the public about study programs and employment opportunities (3.6), but these activities did not yet exhaust the possibilities, especially regarding Internet.

Students are part of the decision making process formally through representatives on the CCS board (3.7) and also through regular feedback on their courses. Students can evaluate the activities of their professors anonymously, and one of the requirements for advancing in the Academy is the positive evaluation by the students. Of course, approaches towards such evaluation can be quite personal, too. Suggestions for improvement might be received with unease, and problems with communicating with some of the faculty may lead to the result that student initiatives will not be taken into account. In any case, as already mentioned, the Panel would encourage the introduction of procedures through which the student body at large would be informed about the outcomes of their suggestions for improvements and similar (3.8).

Specific concerns were voiced by students:

- *Croatology*: Bad communication with the Ministry results in graduates being only allowed to apply for jobs as high school teachers, which is not enough.
- *Psychology*: Students complained that they cannot go on Erasmus schemes because their credits do not transfer.
- *Communication studies*: The course was felt to be excessively focused on theory, while much knowledge is gained through “field work”.

#### **4. Teachers**

The situation of internal and external teachers suffers considerably from serious uncertainties regarding their tenure and future. Ministry regulations have effectively frozen the budget and the management has been discouraged from making use of external teachers, which however play a very important role for maintaining attractive study programs. Moreover, the fact that the CCS is currently not a legal entity dramatically constrains the decision-making of the management, especially with respect to hiring new teachers. There also seem to be some legal

uncertainties regarding the possibility to hire foreign teachers, which however would be essential in making the study program more international. Within these (very tight) limits, the HEI does its best to ensure that the number and qualifications of the teaching staff are in line with the strategic goals (4.1) and it furthers the growth and development of human resources as far as possible (4.2). The HEI has a reasonable student-full-time teacher ratio (4.3) and policies for professional development are in place (4.4). Within the given limits, the teacher's workloads are fairly distributed (4.5), even though the overall workload seems too high (presumably because of too few administrative personnel), and there is no evidence that teaching and research suffer from too many external commitments (4.6).

## **5. *Scientific and professional activity***

In general, the amount and quality of scientific and professional activities is insufficient. In several cases national criteria are met, which however are too low for international standards and will not be sufficient to attract EU and other international funding. The Institute has some interesting research lines and has attracted some more productive researchers in the recent years, but these lines are suffering from a lack of critical mass, which again is a result of a lack of focus of the Institute, and with a lack of collaboration across research lines and study programs—probably for the same reason.

The Panel was struck by a very interesting divergence in the way the role of the Institute is seen by permanent staff members and external teachers. The externals mainly view the Institute as a Center of Excellence that brings together the best researchers in the country to carry out joint, or at least mutually stimulating projects, and it was mainly this view that attracted externals to work at the Institute. That view is not visibly shared by the permanent staff members, who were more concerned about the independence and sustainability of particular research lines. It is this potential as a possible national excellent center that motivates the Panel to insist in developing a coherent research focus.

Accordingly, the Panel considers the current research agenda as a first step (5.1) that however will need to be followed up by the development of a guiding vision and organizing focus. There are some ongoing collaborations with national and international institutions (5.2) but more efforts to build and consolidate such networks will be necessary. Central University input may be needed to formalize such co-operations for legal reasons. The HEI was able to attract some good researchers (5.3) and has set up some measures to improve quality (5.5), but a much more ambitious plan to boost research quality and productivity is required, as the Institute does not meet international standards in terms of papers and projects (5.4, 5.6, 5.7). The Panel feels that there are areas of support that need to be embraced by the central University management in order to increase research quality and productivity – such as a clear internationalization agenda, administrative support for research and similar.

The HEI clearly encourages transfer of knowledge to the public sector (5.8), but there are not many attempts to increase outreach and optimize knowledge translation and exploitation (5.9), which would also improve the financial situation.

Connected to this, the Center should attract more private funding. So far, there are only two grants, one for Croatian studies (with the University of Toronto) and another on Egyptian antiquities. The HEI has a good PhD program and, due to the availability of external teachers, many opportunities for good supervision (5.10).

## **6. *International cooperation and mobility***

The great importance of mobility has clearly been recognized. Many efforts have been made, and a number of successes have been booked, with respect to the push component of mobility: students are encouraged and supported in completing part of their studies abroad (6.1/6.2). Staff members are also strongly encouraged to go abroad and take sabbaticals, but there is a problem of replacement in the teaching program (6.3).

Less successful is the pull component of mobility. The importance of attracting students and foreign colleagues has been recognized in principle, but the Institute is still seeking for appropriate means to organize and finance such endeavors (6.4-6.7). The Panel considers these efforts as being in a “starting phase”.

## **7. *Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances***

The HEI provides very appropriate learning resources for all students, and it has very good facilities (7.1). The Panel emphasizes two important exceptions to that, however:

(1) The library, although well organized, is very small, though we understand that problems arising from this are mitigated by the fact that students enjoy access to other libraries in Zagreb. However, it is essential that the library acquires some essential databases, such as J-Store (7.6). However, it is reassuring that financial sustainability is ensured (7.7) and finances are appropriately used to support and increase teaching and scientific activities (7.8).

(2) the Institute owns no labs and there are scant resources for teaching practical journalism skills – such as stores with cameras and other equipment (7.4/7.5). This is not a problem for some study programs but it certainly is one for communication science, which has no media labs available, and for psychology, which has some access to external laboratories at other institutes but has no means to teach the needed experimental skills on-site. This is a very serious limitation for the attractivity and international competitiveness of the respective study programs. The explicit goal to increase the neuroscientific aspects of psychology (which relies on laboratories and expensive apparatus even more) makes very little sense in this respect.

The policies for professional development of the nonteaching staff (which is extremely efficient and highly popular among students) are effective (7.3), but the low number of nonteaching staff members (7.2) produces work overload in both administrative staff members and teaching personnel (which has to take over parts of the administrative load).

## **FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EXPERT PANEL FOR THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL**

The Institute has interesting study programs and a number of interesting research lines to offer. However, research productivity needs to be strongly improved. Most importantly, a guiding vision and a clear focus of both research lines and study programs will be necessary to develop a strongly needed profile of the institute. It will also be important to clarify the legal status of the institute, so to provide the management with the necessary autonomy for effective decision-making, as well as its legal and scientific relationship to the Humanities Faculty of the University of Zagreb.

### ***ADVANTAGES (STRONG POINTS)***

1. Several interesting study programs exist with many connections to other units of the University of Zagreb and the Society of Jesus, and to other institutes where practical parts of the program can be performed.
2. In some subject areas (such as psychology, communication studies) CCS has developed a strong reputation for providing practical training for its students at professional institutions that it has collaborated with in the long run.
3. With a sufficiently sharpened focus, the CCS has the potential to become/remain a national center of excellence that brings together top researchers in a particular domain and that creates the critical mass that is necessary to create an internationally visible research profile.
4. It appears that despite the lack of formally established student support services (counselling for mental health, employability etc.), the students receive high levels of such support thanks to dedicated staff.
5. Student mobility has increased significantly in the past years, it appears that CCS managed to align the study programmes of all its subjects in such a way that students can spend part of their studies abroad.
6. The collaboration with external teachers (who are often based in research institutes) is a major strength of CCS as it enables knowledge exchange – particularly important at postgraduate level.

7. Students are enthusiastic about the extra-curricular activities that CCS organizes, including guest lectures, conferences and similar.
8. Students are active in organizing students symposia, lectures held by experts who work in practice, movie nights and other forms of extracurricular activity. Also, a lot of them are members of student's associations, which serve to promote their profession and to educate them in less formal way.

### ***DISADVANTAGES (WEAK POINTS)***

1. The greatest weakness that CCS faces – due in large to particular historical and political circumstances present at its founding – is a lack of a unified, distinct and coherent identity that would be reflected in its study programmes and research and would set it aside from other research and teaching institutions – particular from the Faculty of Humanities at Zagreb University.
2. Another overarching concern that relates both to teaching and research is internationalization. It appears to be at very early stages and while student mobility has been increasing, the same cannot be said for teacher mobility. Internationalizing research is a particularly pressing issue for CCS.
3. The scientific productivity does not yet reach international standards and the Panel has not seen sufficient evidence of plans that would support it. Some steps need to be taken at university level – such as more extensive support for research administration – but some can be taken at CCS level – such as collaboration on publications, development of international networks (particularly with Slavic studies) etc.
4. Without full-time staff it is impossible to increase the research output. At the same time there is no overall alternative plan to develop the centre with a sterner emphasis on trade, commerce and related career opportunities for the students. For example, there are no links with Department of Tourism, although this could generate much interest in the centre as tourism is a major source of national income.

5. Fundraising should become a priority if the Centre wishes to develop Croatology in the direction of the 'heritage industry'.
6. A source of concern must be the high drop out rate despite selection at admission stage): this depends on lack of motivation among the students, particularly in History and Latin. Psychology and Communication Studies, which have additional entrance exams, have the lowest drop out rates.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY

## 1. Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance

- The development of a coherent, identifiable identity and an associated focus for study program and research activities will be essential. This identity may, but need not be related to the original concept of Croatian Studies, even though some continuation of these studies would be recommended. Related alternatives that are less constraining and more modern could be a focus on cultural identity in general (which might treat Croatia as just one generalizable example of many smaller European countries) and/or on tourism and foreign affairs. The existing study programs could be continued but might receive a particular „flavor“ that reflects the chosen focus (e.g., culture psychology instead of neuroscience).
- The formal, political, and scientific relationship to the Humanities Faculty of the University of Zagreb should be more clearly defined. Overlap in teaching and research should be avoided or used more effectively to create win-win situations.

## 2. Study Programmes

- The study programs need to be better integrated both with each other and with the general (not yet properly defined) profile of the Institute. The study programs should also be better integrated with ongoing research activities—which however also need to be expanded (see 5.).
- External teachers play a very important role in maintaining interesting, colorful study programs that keep in touch with the professional reality; this role should be continued.
- The practical teaching elements of study programmes should be maintained as these are highly beneficial in terms of employability and also distinctive within the Croatian higher education system.
- The internationalization of study programmes should be continued as it benefits quality of teaching and also provides potential for forming international networks.

## 3. Students

- The available sports facilities need renovation.
- Consideration should be given to providing formal student support facilities – mentoring, mental health, employability etc.
- Formal procedures of informing students about the outcomes of their recommendations (feedback) on quality of teaching should be introduced.
- The establishment of a mentoring scheme (particularly for publications) on the doctoral programme should be considered.
- The mentoring scheme of the undergraduate and graduate programme should be improved, perhaps by including quality students in ongoing research programmes, which could consequently improve their research knowledge and also enhance internationally visible research of CCS and its employees.
- CCS should explore ways of increasing students' employability – e.g. through extra-curricular activities, career advice etc.

#### **4. Teachers**

- The number and the important role of external teachers should not be further diminished. They make very strong contributions to the program.
- The workload of full-time teachers needs to be reduced, also to free more time for research. The reduction of teaching time might be associated with research productivity, so that more productive researchers need to teach less.
- Measures that would enable the greater mobility of teachers should be considered.

#### **5. Scientific and Professional Activity**

- An ambitious plan to boost research quality and productivity is required – particularly within a European and broader international context.
- More international projects/funding need to be acquired. Depending on the chosen focus of the Institute, more collaboration with companies, ministries (e.g., for tourism and foreign affairs), and other institutions could lead to more joint, externally funded research projects.
- More international collaboration should be sought and more foreign researchers (and teachers, depending on the legal opportunities) should be attracted.

- CCS may need to align with other university units in requesting more administrative research support and training (including in the English language).
- An office to help preparing EU grant applications is needed, perhaps shared with other institutes and faculties.
- Among PhD students there was a degree of confusion as to whether they are allowed to publish preliminary results of their your research before defending their PhD. It would be important to clarify this issue and provide students with guidance in terms of their publications strategy.
- Research output is further held back by lack of time due to pressure of teaching and lack of sufficient pool of colleagues with whom to collaborate in order to make an impact.
- Opportunities abroad are likewise limited by pressure of teaching, solutions for that problem should be sought.
- Some departments need a stronger orientation towards (encouraging) publication in international peer-reviewed journals.
- One area of concern was Quality Assurance (QA). An electronic system of evaluation is currently in place, though return rates are low. Decision about the proposed changes are taken by individual departments, not by the QA, which is an advisory body without executive power. QA advice is taken up to varying extent by different departments, though students claim they do not see changes and this is one of the reasons for the low response rate. One way to improve this situation would be to link the departments' implementation of QA recommendations to both academic promotion and funding for individual departments.

## **6. International Cooperation and Mobility**

- As far as possible, staff members should be given the opportunity to spend research visits and sabbaticals at other universities and research institutes.
- Efforts should be increased to attract foreign students and teachers/researchers. European projects and the Erasmus program provide interesting opportunities for that.

- CCS should evaluate its current standing and future plans in terms of international organization membership and international networks in order to better reflect its (revised) research focus.
- CCS could consider ways of increasing the input of doctoral students in building international networks.

## **7. Resources, Administration, Space, Equipment and Finance**

- More administrative support will be necessary, particularly in order to support bidding for European/international grants.
- Some study programs are in need of appropriate labs or equipment (psychology and communication science in particular); as an alternative, the study programs could be reshaped to be less lab-dependent (e.g., culture psychology rather than neuroscience). However, the overall Croatian higher education system and its stipulations should be taken into account in this respect.
- The library should purchase some more databases.
- It is likely that the Croatian higher education system – and CCS as part of it – will be under increasing pressure to obtain funding from a variety of sources. CCS needs to analyze ways in which it can increase its income not only from research but also from co-operation with commercial and other institutions.