



**EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC QUALITY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM "ION MINCU"
– BUCHAREST**

FOREIGN EXPERT'S REPORT



1. Introduction

Following the invitation to participate, as a foreign expert, in the institutional evaluation of "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest – Romania (UAUIM), made by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), I attended to the organized institutional meetings and visits that took place at the UAUIM between the 4th and the 6th of May 2011.

The visit respected the organized schedule of events and meetings with graduates, employers, students, faculty Deans, University Chancellor, Rector and President were very fruitful and informative. A visit to the University's physical infrastructure and facilities was also made to experience the normal day-to-day academic working conditions. This was all conducted in spirit of openness and transparency.

Two chartered translators (one at a time) were present at the Commission meetings, as well as the several individual meetings with Faculty staff and students that I attended. I would like to transmit my appreciation for the hard professional work they performed, sometimes under very stressing conditions. I would also like to transmit my gratitude to everyone, Commission and University members, both technical participants and administrative ones, who made it possible to enable, in such a short time, such a clear and comprehensive overview of the issues at stake. I would also like to thank everyone for the convivial and friendly atmosphere which facilitated me undertaking the task with considerable ease.

This report will use the schedule of the visit as a template as established by ARACIS. The content is based on notes taken during the visit and takes account of several UAUIM institutional documents consulted during the visit.



2. Meeting with the Students

Generally speaking, the students seem to be very proud of their school and they have a sense of well being about being there. They were very shy at manifesting any concerns about the school or the programmes. Apart from some general complains, common to most schools of Architecture in Southern Europe, the following problems should be noted:

- Too many contact hours/classes, leaving little time for personal research and personal life;
- The administrative services are too slow in processing their final grades, which are important in order for them to apply for grants and accommodation;
- Wireless internet doesn't cover the whole school area in a satisfactory manner;
- There should be more cross communication between the three existing programmes (Architecture, Interior Architecture and Urbanism), namely through the realization of mixed workshops and seminars;
- Interior Architecture Students have some difficulties in finding opportunities for practice internship;
- Urbanism Students complain about not being directly involved in the real problems of the City;
- Erasmus Students complain about loss of communication with the academic services while they are abroad.

On the other hand, positive things were stressed, during the meeting that should be noted:

- Students bear a good opinion on the University Library and its collection, stating it is conveniently up to date;
- There are frequent workshops and conferences, with the participation of outside entities;
- There is a good variety of optional courses;
- Students feel they are very well prepared when they attend foreign schools (Erasmus, workshops, etc.);
- Teaching staff is very accessible outside class schedule.

3. Meeting with the Graduates

Graduates appeal less shy about their comments. Whilst having a very good opinion of the school as a whole, they seem to feel a significant contrast between academia and professional practice, which is only normal. Although they feel they should have had more professional practice during school, they recognise that school prepared them well and opened up very good opportunities for them, most notably what is required for



studying abroad. The most referred negative trend had to do with the difficulty they felt encountered in team working, particularly interdisciplinary team work.

The main negative trends stated are also common all around the World, but some should be noted:

- Entering professional practice they had difficulties in coping with economical and political questions of public administration, paper work and legal issues, both in Architecture and Urbanism; they felt they didn't have enough ability to integrate legal aspects in the conceptual design;
- They felt the short periods of professional practice during studies were too short to be productive. They also had some difficulties in team work integration;
- They feel they didn't develop enough communication skills during studies; student communication should be stressed on the different courses;
- The system of admissions at UAUIM is very strict and forces them to stop one year between Secondary Level and University in order to get prepared for it.
- Some courses turned out to be useless and a waste of time (recurrent everywhere).

Positive aspects worth noting were also stressed:

- They feel well prepared to practice different areas of design, not directly related to Architecture and Urbanism, after completing the programme of studies, namely stage, graphic and fashion design;
- University gave them several opportunities of studying and practicing abroad;
- They feel well prepared in spatial and geometrical aspects.

4. Meeting with the Employers

The employers opinion on the school was broadly positive affirming the good preparation of the graduates, namely in their research capacities.

As negative aspects were pointed out:

- The difficulties they face in project management, on the relationship with the clients and with the general processing of paper work.
- The lack of team working skills was also stressed, along with the lack of practice.
- Lack of realism.



However, most of these negative aspects are only normal, following the short periods of professional practice students do during their studies. In most European countries graduates have to perform one or two years of practice before entering the orders of Architects, which means, before being recognized as full Architects.

The most important positive aspects referred were:

- Graduates show good technical principles and good working performance;
- The University teaches the students how to think;
- Graduates show a good balance between theory and practice.

5. Visit to the University Physical Facilities

The University building is a set of spaces built in different times (1927, fifties, 1969/71) and for a first time visitor might look slightly labyrinthic, but neither the students nor the graduates seem to complain about that, which means they feel comfortable with it. History of architectural teaching is present all over and the latest improvements that are being made are of good quality (auditorium, seminar rooms, for instance).

One of the prevalent positive aspects, which is very meaningful for a school of Architecture and Urbanism is its location in central Bucharest, by the historical area of the city. This aspect in itself is much more important than the modernity of the spaces.

The areas seem generous, well adapted to their purposes and conveniently equipped, namely in what's related to IT, modelling premises and library. One might, however, point out the oldness of the studio classes' furniture and some inadequacy of the toilet facilities.

The library seems very well equipped and holds an up to date collection of books and magazines. Its atmosphere would still be more cheerful, should a lighter colour be introduced on the wall painting.

6. The Programmes of Studies

Ion Mincu University is a big school in European terms: the average is around 600 students per school of Architecture, which means Ion Mincu is above average, alongside with most southern state schools (Italy, Spain, Portugal, for instance). This brings advantages – possibility of a good critical mass -, and disadvantages – makes it more difficult to attain a recognizable identity as a school.

The plans of studies are well organized and the Architectural programme meets the European and UIA requirements. Still, some courses could be integrated to prevent the risk of students' dispersion. More interaction between faculties (joint workshops and



seminars between Architecture, Urbanism and Interior Architecture) would stress interdisciplinarity and team work practice.

The fact that the plans of studies in Interior Architecture and in Architecture are organized in one only cycle of Integrated Master studies of five and six years respectively, makes sense if we think only of preparing future Architects, but it corrupts the spirit of Bologna – mobility and change – and reduces the possibility of defining more clearly and with greater intensity the desirable identity of the programmes – capacity of attracting mobility from the outside.

The possibility of conducting the plans of studies into two certified cycles of studies (3+2 and 3+3), allows students to look for a school which offers him/her what he/she already feels he/she wants to stress in his/her academic career when he/she reaches the second cycle. Students can be given the possibility of changing to another school in order to completing his/her architectural education or changing to another master programme of studies (History, Philosophy, Urban Planning, for instance).

Ion Mincu University has a very good international performance and is widely known as a good school of Architecture all over Europe. Second cycle studies should be done also in order to attract students from other countries, apart from the Socrates/Erasmus programmes, should a strong identity be stressed and courses in the English language be introduced.

7. General Conclusions

Most of the conclusions have already been touched on in the report. There is no model which could be taken as a definite example on how to teach Architecture, Interior Architecture or Urbanism. There is no such a thing as a model on how a perfect School of Architecture should be. Nevertheless, there are some experiences on the theme and measurable results which could be used as references. Architecture is an overly comprehensive matter to be matched with a safe and incontestable method of pedagogical actions and attitudes fitting an expected outcome. Every country, every region, every territory tends to perform its own attitude on architectural significance.

Architecture, by itself, tends to interpret its reasonable place and part in culture, economy (*oikos+nomos*), ecology (*oikos+logos*), and opportunity, from site to site, from time to time. Architecture emerges and determines, at the same time and all by itself, the conditions, the welfare and the expectations of citizenship, in time and space. Its teaching is preceded by the expectations of the ecosystem where it occurs and is bound to precede the formulations of collective future, by designing hypothesis of its outcome.

A school of Architecture is supposed to prepare the future using the present as a laboratory and the past as a collection of interpreted memories. The Plans of Studies of

UAUIM are supported in their aims. Students are being prepared to design with a critical thinking and research abilities; graduates are taught to adapt to change. Change is unpredictable, but a positive attitude towards it can be developed. UAUIM seems to be able to cope with this issue. UAUIM seems to have been preparing itself, its Faculty staff and its students for global thinking (international visibility and action) and for change, in a country meeting new paradigms, not just following the tendencies, but also deepening its own culture and knowledge. This is expressed in the Plans of Studies of the faculty programmes at stake.

Nevertheless, regarding the school as an element of European architectural teaching, one should stress two aspects, which could be developed towards a more universal outfit: the assumption of the Bologna degrees – Bachelor and Master -, under the exposed reasons; the overcoming of the language barriers, by offering second cycle programmes in English. As for the programmes of studies, some rethinking on the extension of different matters should be done, uniting them in shorter and all-encompassing courses, specifically in what's related to informative areas. More interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity should eventually be stressed through the different faculty programmes and practices.

Some discussion should be held amongst the faculty staff on the Bologna adequacy, namely in what's related to the professional 6 year programme in Architecture and the 5 year programme in Interior Architecture, in what relates to the eventual division into two certificated degrees: Bachelor and Master. As stated beforehand, this is more of a practical than of a scientific or pedagogical matter: it has to do with the possibility of mobility and change for the students' sake.

Seen as a whole, and considering all the negative and positive aspects this report gave in account, I should say UAUIM is a school I would advise my own students to attend, should they aim at becoming active Architects in our contemporary society and world.

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Luis F. P. Conceicao, Doctor Architect

Full Professor

Director of the Department of Architecture of ISMAT, Portimao, Portugal

Professor at Universidade Lusiana de Lisboa

Council Member of EAAE – European Association for Architectural Education