

GHEORGHE DIMA MUSIC ACADEMY, CLUJ NAPOCA EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR REGISTRATURĂ	2015
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Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the Gheorghe Dima Music Academy, Cluj Napoca (AMGD) as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 15 July and Friday 17 July 2015. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of AMGD focusing on the main points of continuous 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 AMGD and the guidelines of external institutional evaluation from ARACIS. During my stay in Cluj Napoca 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 AMGD. My report is roughly following the structure of the self evaluation report of the institution.

Background

The predecessor organization of the AMGD, the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art was founded in Cluj as an academic institution in 1919. Although the artistic higher education in Cluj dates back to 1819, which was the founding year of the Hungarian Music Conservatory, where courses were taught in German and Hungarian, the establishment of the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art was the first Romanian language music higher education institution in Cluj, Transylvania. Its goal was to prepare artists (singers, instrument players and actors) for the Romanian Opera House and National Theater, as well as preparing music teachers for schools of all grades. The first leader of the new institution was the composer, conductor and professor Gheorghe Dima (1847-1925). Later, the Academy has been named after him.

The Gheorghe Dima Music Academy with its almost 100 year old tradition has a significant role in Transylvania and Romania. This long story through time, changing socio-economic systems, restructuring processes and transformations is a permanent evolution of educational programs that continuously meet the needs of the students. As an important institution in Romanian higher education on the field of music this university always has been attractive for those who wanted to get knowledge, skills and competencies on music and music related fields at high standards. Well-known personalities of Romanian music and culture were the members of the Academy teaching staff from the beginning by providing high-quality educational services for the students of the institution. The tradition, the experience, the prestige and the competences of AMGD show the importance of the institution both national and international level. On the whole the institution meets the cultural and social needs of the community.

According to the self-evaluation report of the AMGD, the strategic objectives focusing on the maintenance of the present favorable position and provide future development with improving institutional quality and management, teaching and learning environment, ensuring a high quality level of education that meet the needs of the students parallel with promoting the Romanian cultural and musical values.

Leadership, managerial structures

According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of AMGD have appropriate competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures of the two faculties of the university, the departments, centers and other organizational units of the institution have a transparent, logical structure and they are suited for the correct management processes of the organization. The operation of the institution rely on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation and improvement of the different types of programs, quality management, human resources management and economic activity. The present system is suitable for a good level of operation and management of the institution.

In 2012, there were certain organizational structure changes of the Academy: the Faculty of Musical Theater, incorporated in the Faculty of Music Performance, and the Faculty of Music of Piatra Neamt from this time is functioning as a university extension offering three Bachelor's degree programs of the Academy, and five departments were have been formed instead of the earlier eleven chairs. These changes have been certainly resulted a better level of performance and higher quality standards parallel with reducing some operational costs of the institution.

The management and the colleagues of the institution are working on improving constantly the education process and scientific research with permanent cooperation with similar institutions, as well as with institutions from the local, regional, national and international environment.

Educational programs, teaching staff

The university has 2 faculties and offering educational programs at BA level (Music Performance – Instruments; Music Performance – Singing; Musical Theatre; Musical Composition; Musicology; Conducting; Music Pedagogy), MA level (Music Performance - Instruments, Singing; Musical Theatre; Musical Composition - Musicology – Conducting; Music Pedagogy) and a doctoral study program (Ph.D. in Musicology) as well. This program started in Cluj in 1968 and it was the only doctoral study program in the Romanian higher education in this field for a long time. Between 1972 and 2015, 360 students received a PhD degree in this doctoral school.

All the study programs offered by the Academy are conducted in the Romanian language.

The Academy has two faculties (Faculty of Music Performance; Theoretical Faculty), five departments, two support-departments, and a university extension in Piatra Neamt. In 1998, under the patronage of the Academy the Musical College of Piatra Neamt was established. In the academic year 2005-2006 this college became the fourth faculty of the Academy. In the 2012 - 2013 academic year, this faculty became a University Extension of the institution, offering BA study programs of the Faculty of Music Performance and of the Theoretical Faculty.

Also in 1998, the Department for Continuing Education and Distance Learning started to operate, offering short-time higher education programs and later BA programs. In 2000, a Department of Teacher Education and Training was founded within the framework of the institution, providing psychological, pedagogical and methodological training for future teachers.

It is important to point out that students of the Academy have the possibility to learn cultural management, parallel with other optional disciplines (Musical education systems, Liturgical music module, Light music module, Traditional folk instrument). The cultural marketing and management studies could prepare students well for the challenges of market coordination mechanisms that characterize the field of art as well. This knowledge is also useful for them if they would like to get proper competencies to manage themselves, if they would like to start their own business, or they would be leaders of different cultural institutions and organizations. This initiative has a very important role in the future to create an own, special characteristic of the institution while several other music academies do not pay enough attention to develop such an education program and do not offer these disciplines for students.

It is also important to note that the AMGD is intending to participate in the initiative in Viterbo, Italy generated by higher education institutions of Cluj where educational programs are offered to the local Romanian communities.

University staff of the institution is both academically and professionally highly qualified in the field of music composition, performance, and musicology. The titular teaching staff in AMGD 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, the Academy has 135 tenured staff members (25 professors, 34 associate professors, 43 lecturers, 31 university assistants and 2 junior assistants). From these, 109 have a Ph.D. degree, while 25 colleagues are Ph.D. candidates. The number of the associate teaching staff is 35 (11 retired tenured university teachers, 2 tenured university teachers from other education institutions, 24 teachers who are not tenured in higher education but meet the legal conditions to fill such positions).

According to the self-evaluation report of the institution and my personal field experiences the scientific potential and quality of human resources of AMGD are on a good level. Beyond the professional competences it is important to point out that the language skills of the staff (including not just the titular teaching staff but even the administrative and other employees) is good.

It is also important to add that the teaching staff from AMGD enjoys a large national and international recognition and appreciation, which is also leading to their presence in music institutions, in specialized bodies and committees in the country and abroad.

Material assets

The capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the existing regulations. The equipments and installations in connection with the educational process seem to be an important priority and supply the demands of students quite well. Students have access to high quality musical instruments, many of which are of European and international standard, such as the Steinway or Bechstein pianos.

On the other hand, the Academy has been confronting with a building ownership issue: the building serving as the Academy's headquarters has been restituted and therefore is currently occupied on lease. An improvement of the situation has been recently made through the efforts of the management of the institution to solve this challenge. Hopefully in the near future the Academy would manage this problem to receive an appropriate location but it is clear that without central state budget resources and contributions of the local actors the institution is not able to finance this development from its own resources. This unsolved situation certainly results that the institution only spends money in case of urgent need for conservation (certain classrooms and laboratories, reconstruction of the concert hall that is going to start soon, etc.) instead of spending resources for broader infrastructural projects and investments at the present location. If the above mentioned situation will be not improved considerably in the near future the Academy has to solve these issues related to the achievement of the required standards at the present location.

It is also important to mention the development of new dormitory for students with 30 beds in 15 rooms with kitchen and bathroom (2011), which provide proper conditions for accommodation and study. The present capacities cover just a certain part of the total number of students but it seems to be enough as large number of students are from Cluj or from the surrounding areas so they basically don't need this type of assistance of accommodation. To get a dormitory place depends on the learning performance of the students.

Financial activity

As a nonprofit institution, the university is establishing funds for activity from the annual state finance, school tuition taxes, from donations, sponsorships and other extra budget incomes. According to the data, the financial activities of the institution are well-balanced. During the last years there has been a certain decrease in the number of state-funded students and of the fee-based students enrolled in Bachelor's degree programs (largely due to the insufficient number of student places, while the number of applicants exceeds the schooling capacity of most of the offered programs). This situation results a relatively stable operation but in the near future if the new facilities, infrastructure and human resources allow the institution should make efforts to increase the capacity numbers in order to enroll more students. It is also important to point out, that most of the students of the university are state financed and only a small part of the students pay tuition fee for the education which means that the institution is relatively sensible for the changes of the state financing policies and directions.

According to the special human resource needs (smaller groups, personal assistance, etc.) of the offered programs, relatively large portion of the incomes cover the staff-related expences of the university (83,62% in 2014) which certainly mean that resources cover the other operational expences of the Academy are relatively lower, so despite of the above mentioned sustainable financial situation without an intensive state support the institution might not able to finance the actual, incurring costs of development from the own resources. On the other hand, also from the special characteristic of the institution, teachers and students could offer their talent and special knowledge on the field of music as a 'service' which is – compare with

other higher education institutions – result much better chance to generate own, extra budget incomes.

Students

In the present academic year the total number of students is 796. 73% of the students are attending BA programs, 21% learns on MA programs, and 6% are participating in the full time doctoral program of the institution. 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 in the future.

The Academy has a large number of partnerships, international cooperation and bilateral institutional agreements with universities and institutions (53) mostly from European countries. The AMGD is also participating in the ERASMUS program where parallel with the student mobility there is also remarkable teacher mobility in the university. Although it seems that 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 increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities.

It is important to add that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. The AMGD presents its educational offer with using traditional offline and online tools to reach the different target groups. The good reputation of AMGD 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 support. According to the data, more than 70% of the graduates are employed in education or in cultural institutions within a period of two years from graduation.

The public information can be found on the AMGD site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian language. The university also uses the facebook and facebook groups as a communication channel.

2010 was the foundation year of the AMGD Students' Association. The main role of this association, according to the report and the discussions of the president of the association is to represent the needs and interests of the students of the Academy, to protect the students' rights and obligations, to promote the cultural activities, to improve the students' learning, accommodation and leisure conditions; to ensure effective communication with the management; to build partnerships with other student associations in the country and abroad.

Between February and May, 2015, 41 students of the Academy have benefited from career counselling services. The counselling activity was organized for 5 groups of 6-12 students and comprised 5 2-hour weekly meetings in which the issues debated and the activities carried out were related to self-knowledge, labor market exploration, professional portfolio development, career target setting and career goal achievement.

During my visit I had the possibility to meet with some students of the institution and I have found them very open minded, motivated and talented. I also had the possibility to participate in a concert where students and teachers together showed their attainments.

Research activities

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 AMGD, just like everywhere in the European Union member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European Union resources, projects and funds become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities.

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 AMGĐ 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 within the framework of the faculties, departments and research teams organized in research centers, laboratories and research workshops. The research activity is performed by both teachers and students, especially by the students attending the masters' degree and doctoral program. The doctoral supervisors also play an important role in the research activities. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intense collaboration with organizations, universities and state institutions and expand the international cooperation as well. The main areas of research activity are on the field of musicology, ethnomusicology, art music creation, art music performance, orchestra conducting, choir conducting, musical theatre directing, choreography directing, folk music performance, pedagogy sciences.

The Academy has its own online and offline publications (Musicology Papers, Information and Communication Technologies in Music, Intermezzo). Significant research results have also been obtained within the framework of numerous grants and have been made public through the publication of doctoral theses, books and scientific papers or through CD recordings or recordings of concerts held in Romania or abroad.

In the last few years AMGĐ has expanded its bilateral institutional agreements, currently managing 53 partnerships with universities in Germany, France, Italy, England, Poland, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Turkey, Belgium, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Finland, the Netherlands, Hungary and Slovakia, and the institution is working on developing new collaborations with music institutions in Canada, China, and Ecuador through the new lines of the Erasmus Plus program. At the same time, the short-term strategy includes the implementation of the international practice placements as a major objective for the future graduates' integration into the labor

market and to the international environment. Besides the Erasmus and ErasmusPlus Program, the institution is also active in CEEPUS mobilities “New Cooperation Initiatives in the Central European Professional Music Training”, exchanging of experience, knowledge and good practices between partner universities in Austria, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Moldova, Romania and Serbia.

In the Fulbright mobility program in the last years the Academy has hosted 3 visiting professors from the United States.

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 AMGD meets the educational and professional training specific standards, as well as the community social and economic development standards and European standards of education and scientific research. I recommend the high level of confidence rate for the Academy with emphasizing the following:

- Although the present situation, role and reputation of AMGD is good, the university should pay enough attention to the permanent changes (number of students, financial stability, changing needs of the potential students, etc.);
- AMGD should continue to invest in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow, parallel with solving the ‘location’ challenges of the Academy;
- According to the fact that the institution has earlier traditions in Hungarian language teaching, it would be an unique initiative to start some educational programs in Hungarian language in the future (folk music/ethnomusicology);
- The university has to exploit more intensively the potential of the teachers and students with offering more programs, cultural events, performances, concerts, or concert seasons for the public;

- The AMGD permanently has to manage its national and international partnerships and cooperations and, and should establish new partnerships with socio-cultural institutions, associations, companies;
- The institution has to continue to develop cultural marketing and management programs which certainly could be a special offer for the students of the Academy to have better competencies and find their place in the world of work. It is also possible to develop joint degree programs in this field with other European universities as well;
- It is worth to develop an English language website if the AMGD would like to make efforts to increase the number of international students participating in educational programs;
- Based on the present initiatives, it is worth to continue the development of a follow-up system for tracking graduates' career paths and establish a contact and feedback system with graduates.

Finally I would like to thank to the Rector and all the Academy staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Cluj. 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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Iván Zádori PhD
Assistant Professor
University of Pécs
Hungary