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Institutional Evaluation Programme

*Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and
Innovation in Romanian Universities Project*

UNIVERSITY OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM ION MINCU

EVALUATION REPORT

May 2013.

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of University of Architecture and Urbanism Ion Mincu (UAUIM). The evaluation took place in 2012-2013 in the framework of the project “Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities”, which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

The evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system, and specifically in accordance with the provisions of the 2011 Law on Education and the various related normative acts.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a ‘fitness for (and of) purpose’ approach:



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- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2. University of Architecture and Urbanism Ion Mincu's profile

UAUIM has a very long established tradition and in the education of architects in Romania. The university is the oldest institution in Romania devoted to the higher training of architects and has a strong identity associated with architecture, though in recent years it has been expanding to other related areas such as urban planning and interior design. The university has traditionally presented a strong commitment to high-quality training and it is now trying to combine this with a more visible engagement in research activities.

There is a good atmosphere and collaborative environment within the institution. University status and identity are very important issues and the scale of the institution helps to create an atmosphere of close relationships among internal stakeholders. The university has started to develop a common institutional quality system.

UAUIM enjoys a positive image by the outside community. According to external and internal stakeholders, the university holds a leading position within the country in several areas and is making efforts to promote greater internationalisation of its activities. UAUIM presents several academic strengths that are recognised nationally and internationally.

Like many other universities, UAUIM faces a very challenging environment. The complex context faced by UAUIM is due to a multifaceted set of factors. Like many of its European counterparts, the Romanian higher education system has undergone a period of intense and rapid massification over the last decades. However, in recent years, demographic changes have negatively affected the patterns of demand and UAUIM has been facing a very adverse context in this respect. This adverse context is not unique in the Romanian context and it is being felt by many other institutions.

To these challenges should be added important systemic constraints felt throughout the Romanian higher education system. The current economic crisis has enhanced severe financial constraints that affect Romanian public universities and reflect the constraints faced in public expenditure. Despite the severe financial constraints and important financial cuts, the university also faces limited autonomy and flexibility in the use of its financial resources.

To these financial limitations should be added a context of important limitations to institutional autonomy. Like the rest of Romanian public higher education institutions, UAUIM faces not only very detailed national regulations that hinder its capacity to develop an autonomous strategy of development, but also a context of legal instability that undermine



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the potential to pursue its mission and strategy in a consistent manner. These issues are part of a wider problem of limited institutional autonomy affecting management and administration, which is reflected in aspects such as the restrictions regarding the recruitment of new staff and the promotion of the existing one.

After a very favourable period, the economic crisis of recent years has created a very problematic economic context. The current economic crisis has had a particularly significant negative impact in the area of construction and in public works. This has produced significant difficulties for the transition of the university's graduates to the labour market, since it has severely affected the labour opportunities for recent graduates in architecture and urban planning.

The challenges faced by European universities are not restricted to a national level, but are increasingly taking on a European and international dimension. In fact, one of the major driving forces for recent changes in universities has been the process of reform of the European Higher Education Area, to which the Bologna Process is central. Among the major priorities of the Bologna Process mention ought to be made of the structural changes associated with the introduction of the three-cycle system (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate), the strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms, and the recognition of qualifications and periods of study across Europe. The development of this process has led to intense discussions and policy changes in many European countries and Romania is no exception.

Current trends require universities to be more responsive and capable of reflecting on their mission and refining their major priorities. However, universities often face significant constraints regarding their capacity to live up to those challenges. On the one hand, for many European universities this has only recently become a major issue of concern and they are still adapting to those changing times. On the other hand, many European universities also have a limited degree of institutional autonomy, though this has improved in recent decades.

Despite the challenging context, UAUIM has been developing a vision of becoming both a European and national reference university and it has worked toward fulfilling that objective. We hope that this report will help the university to better fulfil its mission and priorities.

1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the following self-evaluation group: Assoc. Prof. Beatrice-Gabriela Jöger, Vice-Rector for Image and International Cooperation (Chairperson); Prof. Ana Maria Zahariade; Assoc. Prof. Anca Mitrache; Lecturer Liviu Ianasi (academic secretary); Lecturer Codina Dusoiu; Emanuela Agent, Student; Econ. Cristina Han (Human Resources Director). In order to gather updated data the self-evaluation group collaborated with the Committee for the Evaluation and Quality Assurance in UAUIM and the academic units of the UAUIM, as well as with all the departments and main administrative



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services. The report was discussed with the deans and vice-deans as well as within the Faculties' Councils and each Department's Board.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) is grateful for the significant effort undertaken by these persons to develop the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The composition of the Self-Evaluation Team (SET) was close to the leadership of the university and included members who are very knowledgeable about UAUIM's activities. The self-evaluation process (SEP) has indicated that the university has very detailed knowledge about itself, benefitting from previous experience with quality assessment at national and international levels.

The team believes that the preparation of the SER helped UAUIM to develop a better degree of self-knowledge through discussion of the current situation and collection of relevant data. The SEP has been developed in good cooperation with faculties and departments. Nevertheless, there has been a limited engagement of students in the process, which is a difficulty frequently observed in many institutions in this type of activity. This should require additional attention from the university in future quality assessment activities.

As it often happens in this type of process, the team identified a more limited awareness about the evaluation process among those without management responsibilities. Hence, the team considers that the SEP was an important first step in building a self-evaluation culture at the UAUIM, but that this should be further developed through more critical reflection about the institution and the mobilisation of the whole university along that process.

The SER provided extensive information about the UAUIM, especially through the numerous and detailed appendices. The review team considered it very detailed, comprehensive, and helpful. The team found the SWOT analysis as very honest and perceptive and it can become an excellent departure point for future improvements and developments. The main challenge now will be to use the diagnosis found in the SER to address the perceived weaknesses and challenges.

This evaluation process was an important first step in deepening a self-evaluation culture that should be based on critical reflection and the mobilisation of the whole university to discuss future developments. The team believes that the SEP has helped the UAUIM to improve its degree of self-knowledge through discussion of its current strategy and a reflection on future developments.

The self-evaluation report of the *UAUIM*, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team in late November 2012. The visits of the evaluation team to UAUIM took place from 16 to 18 December 2012 and from 24 to 27 March 2013, respectively. In between the visits *UAUIM* provided the evaluation team with some additional documentation.

The evaluation team consisted of:



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- **Prof. Gülsün Saglamer**, Former Rector, Istanbul Technical University (Turkey), team chair
- **Prof. Hans Beunderman**, Former Vice-Rector, Delft University of Technology (The Netherlands)
- **Mr. Mikko Leino**, University of Turku and European Student Union (Finland)
- **Prof. Pedro Teixeira**, Professor, University of Porto and Director of CIPES (Portugal), team coordinator

During the two visits, the evaluation team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of the UAUIM with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders. The visits included several meetings with the leadership of the UAUIM; with members of the academic and the administrative staff; with students; and with representatives of public authorities and other external stakeholders. The team also visited some facilities of the university to increase its understanding about the institution.

The discussions with the members of UAUIM have greatly helped the team to better understand some aspects of the university's internal organisation, its history and its dynamics. The participation of all those involved in the evaluation was very positive. The current report benefitted greatly from the engagement of the various internal and external stakeholders of the university in those meetings.

The evaluation team wants to express its gratitude to all participants of the interviews for the openness and willingness to discuss all issues concerning the university during the meetings. Special thanks go to Prof. Beatrice Jöger who was the liaison person of the UAUIM with the evaluation team and who was responsible for the efficient organisation of all the meetings and discussions. Finally, the evaluation team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector Prof. Zeno Bogdanescu and to the UAUIM for the friendly hospitality.



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2. Governance and institutional decision making

The UAUIM presents a very strong attachment to its historical position in the training of architects in Romania and that has shaped the identity of the university. However, the university has been trying in recent years to expand to other related areas. The multiple and complex challenges that universities face nowadays require them to have a clear vision about its strategic priorities of development, of the constituencies they are trying to serve and how they are trying to serve them. This requires an intense process of discussion and determination of the institutional mission that can sustain and differentiate UAUIM within the Romanian higher education system. UAUIM will be able to develop a clearer mission statement through a stronger commitment to self-analysis and the participation of the whole university and that this will contribute to develop an even stronger institutional identity.

The university faces a challenging context and the current economic crisis has worsened the shortcomings due to a restrictive degree of institutional autonomy. However, this should not deter the university from exploiting the existing possibilities, in order to pursue its interests and priorities. Pressing daily matters and financial and administrative constraints certainly occupy much of the time and attention of the bodies of the university and its leadership, but they need to balance those short-term concerns with the discussion and pursuit of long-term objectives.

The team is aware that the UAUIM has taken some steps in the development of strategic planning. The degree of government intervention and the seeming instability in the regulatory framework recommends that the university approaches planning in a more flexible manner and focusing on medium-term goals. The planning timeframe needs to be adjusted to a context presenting a degree of stability falling short of what would be desirable for the university. Moreover, the university needs to be more explicit about its goals and milestones in order to understand the pace of progress towards the former and improve it (if necessary).

The team thinks that UAUIM's leadership shows a high level of commitment to the institution; and there has been a general appreciation, across the institution, of the institutional leadership's commitment, and widespread good levels of dedication from academic and non-academic staff. This is something that should be underlined given the current difficulties faced by the university regarding its human resources management, notably the fact that new positions and promotions have been blocked for several years.

The university combines in an effective way a centralised approach to management with more decentralised developments and initiatives related to content. The team did not find examples of obvious redundancy and duplication of tasks in its organisational structure. This is helped by the scale of the institution that facilitates the communication and participation across the university. This will be also important to an effective integration of the more recent areas into the wider institutional structure that may exploit their full potential and combine their contribution with the oldest and more established field of architecture.



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The university is adjusting to recent changes in the governance structure that have been implemented nationally. Some of the governing bodies are still learning to understand its mission and its importance within the institution's life. This is particularly the case of the Senate, which has become a significant forum for discussion of major issues for the life of the university, though this is largely unacknowledged by most of the university's constituents since they receive little or no information about its agenda and the main outcomes of its deliberations. The team considers it essential that the Senate and other similarly important bodies are able to communicate effectively and widely their role and contributions across the university.

In accordance with these observations the team recommends that:

- UAUIM should develop strategies to deal with current uncertainty and explore existing limited autonomy.
- The team encourages the university to pursue a flexible and adaptive approach to medium-term planning in order to accommodate its challenging and unstable context.
- The university should aim at exploring fully the institutional potential of more recent fields and combine their strengths with the ones of the more established field of architecture;
- Important bodies, such as the Senate, should communicate their activities more effectively and widely.



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3. Teaching and learning

The UAUIM has a very good local and national reputation regarding teaching, which has been recognised in previous national and international accreditations (as the ones done by ARACIS and RIBA). The team has identified a general appreciation by students of the dedication of the teaching staff and this seems to be a very important part of a wider high degree of satisfaction expressed by students regarding the university. However, the level of appreciation was not evenly shared across the university and in some faculties students seemed to be more satisfied than in others.

Moreover, some students were also a bit sceptical about the impact and effectiveness of feedback provided. One of the factors that seem to foster some dissatisfaction among students has to do with significant delays in publicising the results of assessment. The team is aware that this is a matter that concerns the leadership of the university and that efforts are being made to address this problem.

One of the major changes in recent years has been the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area, which has encouraged a greater international orientation in the training of new graduates. UAUIM has developed efforts to follow these developments associated with the European Higher Education Area and has taken steps towards the implementation of the Bologna cycles and introduction of ECTS, although this has been embraced unevenly across the university. Although students have shown a strong preference for greater mobility and flexibility in the degree structure, the university has shown some resistance to move towards that direction and some of the programmes have changed little as compared to the pre-Bologna period.

Furthermore, the team found a somewhat limited awareness of changes in teaching and learning promoted by the Bologna Process. This includes aspects such as promoting active learning among students and a greater emphasis on the development of transversal competences and skills that may be relevant for future graduates. The team recognises that there are some relevant developments in this respect at UAUIM, but considers that the university should place a greater emphasis on project management and teamwork, which are important for the development of certain valuable skills and for students' future professional life.

The team thinks that the university could give greater prominence to pedagogical innovativeness and effectiveness. Despite the existing significant constraints, especially regarding the recruitment of academic staff and the physical facilities, the team believes that the university has the capacity to make some additional improvements, namely by placing more emphasis on the learning of students in academic and professional environments.

The significant financial restrictions afflicting the university create problems with the facilities that certainly hinder the teaching and learning activities. Those limitations regarding space



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are especially problematic for students working on projects and practical courses and students and teaching staff have expressed their concern about the negative impact that those limitations have for the learning process and for the teaching and assessment possibilities that can be considered and implemented. Moreover, some supporting facilities (e.g. libraries) are underfunded and that reflects in the quality of the services provided to students, both in the quantity of bibliographic resources available and in the schedules to use the existing resources.

The limitations faced by the university in this issue are also reflected in other ancillary facilities (like canteens and accommodation) that also seem to suffer from a lack of investment and create significant dissatisfaction among students. Although these services are not directly linked with the learning process, their quality clearly affects the wellbeing of students, their satisfaction and motivation; and they feel strongly about these matters. The case of university residential facilities is particularly significant, since for many students that would be an alternative study and working space vis-à-vis the aforementioned limited options available at the university. Although the university is making an effort to maintain and improve the existing facilities the best it can within a stringent financial situation, this problem needs to be addressed more forcefully.

Despite those financial limitations, the university may consider exploring more systematically certain tools that can contribute to a better learning environment and in some cases to minimise some of the aforementioned difficulties. One of those tools could be a more extensive use of information technologies, both for learning and for communication purposes. A more extensive use of bibliographic electronic resources may help to circumvent limitations in the space and staff available to facilities such as libraries. ICT can also be important in fostering more effective communication with students regarding course matters and administrative issues. The latter seems particularly relevant in view of persistent difficulties with the publication of assessment results, which is a source of significant dissatisfaction among many students.

According to the information collected in the interviews, the graduates from the university have a good reputation in the labour market and benefit from the prominent position of UAUIM in the Romanian system. The team considers that UAUIM is taking visible steps to improve its tracking of employability, though there is no regular tracking of graduates and there is a limited practice of consultation with employers and external stakeholders about professional routes. This seems particularly relevant in view of the current difficulties in the transition to the labour market experienced by many graduates. This also seems to be relevant for graduates in areas where the UAUIM has a more recent training activity. Some of the aspects that require greater attention regarding employability include the need for greater adaptability of graduates and proactive attitudes regarding labour market needs. Also in this respect the university will benefit from exploring its links with employers and alumni.



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Related to the development of generic skills and competences, the team identified a perception that there is limited involvement of students in the many social and extra-curricular activities available. Although the university devotes significant attention to the promotion of these activities, it would be important to explore ways to involve more students in those activities. Moreover, this could be regarded as an important tool to promote greater proactivity and institutional commitment among students that could nurture important positive side effects on their employability and entrepreneurship.

Finally, the team had the opportunity to discuss the purposes and outlook of UAUIM's teaching mission with representatives from the branch campus recently established in Sibiu. The team considers that the branch in Sibiu faces significant challenges regarding its sustainability. Although the team is aware that the university is developing several efforts to strengthen this branch, we think that UAUIM should reflect on the financial and educational viability of its Sibiu branch.

In accordance with these observations the team recommends that:

- UAUIM should reflect on greater flexibility and adaptability regarding degree programme and curricula by looking at the current developments in the EHEA and their potential relevance.
- The university should develop supporting mechanisms that may help academic staff whenever they feel the need to update their teaching skills and techniques.
- Efforts should be made for a greater use of ICT in supporting access to information and its effective and timely circulation.
- Greater attention should be devoted to improve some facilities (such as libraries and students' services), within the existing financial limitations.
- UAUIM should reflect on the financial and educational viability of its Sibiu branch, namely by balancing costs and resources and how it contributes to its strategic goals in the short and long-term.



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4. Doctoral Education and Research

UAUIM is regarded by the internal and external stakeholders as a leading institution in its areas of expertise, although until recently the emphasis tended to be placed on teaching and learning activities. In more recent years UAUIM has been trying to develop a more significant and extensive commitment to research activities. Important developments in this respect have been the establishment of the doctoral school, several research centres and efforts to attract research funding.

The doctoral school is an important development and it may play an important role in the volume, quality and interdisciplinarity of the research produced. Its creation opens the opportunity to the University for expanding its activities in advanced training and in research activities, notably by combining the strengths existing across the university in a creative and innovative way. Moreover, there are positive attempts to involve PhD students in research activities and attempts of greater inter-departmental collaboration. However, the team felt that the role of the doctoral school is still being discussed and reflected on by the university and encourages the university to give significant attention to the definition of its mission and contribution to the life of UAUIM.

At the moment the potential of the doctoral school is also significantly hindered due to external regulations regarding supervision's eligibility. The team is aware that the university is taking steps to encourage more faculty members to fulfil the criteria required nationally to supervise doctoral students, but at the moment the number of those who can take that responsibility is extremely small. This not only creates an overload for those few faculty members, but it is certainly detrimental for an adequate supervision of an expanding cohort of doctoral students.

Regarding research activities currently developed, design research seems to be the main approach. The current research portfolio faces some difficulties regarding its external assessment and recognition and hinders the access to external funding. Thus, the university needs to rethink its current portfolio in a way that may balance the specificities of the fields developed at UAUIM with the criteria applied to assess research proposals and research outcomes at the national and international levels.

In terms of research intensity, most of the teaching staff at UAUIM presents a limited engagement with research activities. This seems to reflect an institutional identity that has traditionally privileged teaching and training activities. The limited commitment to research also seems to be due to a variety of factors that include the limited time available due to the teaching load of many faculty members and the seemingly insufficient resources and support given to research activities.



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The research portfolio of UAUIM seems to be mainly the sum of individual decisions and strategies. Moreover, although the establishment of research units has attempted to foster a greater degree of coordination and cooperation in research activities, the current research centres still play a small role in the development of an institutional research strategy. At the moment, research centres seem mainly to aggregate the individual initiatives and preferences.

These institutional weaknesses are aggravated by the pressure to obtain research funding. The financial stringency affecting the Romanian higher education system has led UAUIM, like many of its counterparts, to search for alternative ways to pursue its research activities. During the evaluation the team became aware of the efforts that many faculty members developed to obtain funding at the national and international levels. Although the team recognises these efforts and understands the pressures that led to this situation, it also considers that it creates the risk of pulverisation and hinders the coherence and effectiveness of the overall research mission. That also means that there is limited scope for definition of priorities and that these activities are more financially-driven rather than strategically-driven.

One of the aspects that could contribute to a stronger institutional coherence in research activities would be to strengthen the role of the university's research office, by making it a more proactive tool in supporting the current efforts to identify and target funding opportunities that can match the research profile of UAUIM. The role of such an office should not be limited to the dissemination of available opportunities of funding for research (though this is in itself already very valuable), but should focus also in helping the research teams in developing successful applications. These are often cumbersome and complex processes that will be more effectively dealt with by more experienced and specialised staff members.

Overall, the team feels that the university needs to reflect on these challenges and the leadership of the university needs to pay more attention to research activities. In particular, it needs to consolidate an institutional approach to research activities that may build on the university's reputation in the fields of architecture and urbanism. The university should examine to what extent there is research strength across the whole institution and in each field. This is an important aspect also regarding the academic rejuvenation of the institution on a long-term basis.

In accordance with these observations the team recommends that:

- There is a need to reflect on the missions of the Doctoral Council and school and their role within the university.
- UAUIM should pursue further its efforts to enlarge the number of potential supervisors.
- UAUIM should stimulate greater interaction between the doctoral school and the research centres.
- Strengthening doctoral education is also important regarding the future quality of education in all the fields covered by the university.



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- There is a need to identify priority areas and to nurture them in order to be more focused, more effective and efficient in research.
- UAUIM should strengthen the role of research centres and their selectivity regarding priorities and eligibility.
- The university should strengthen the role of the research office, especially in finding and disseminating information about potential funding opportunities.
- UAUIM should promote greater coordination and guidance of research efforts, capabilities and project applications.



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5. Service to society

One of the major challenges faced by European universities refers to their capacity to develop activities that are economically and socially relevant for their local, regional, and national environment. This relationship with their external environment is one of the dimensions of universities' missions that has been receiving increasing attention in recent years. This poses significant challenges to universities since it constitutes a complex and multifarious network of institutional and individual relationships within universities, which continuously show their contribution to the various communities they are serving.

UAUIM is perceived as having a positive contribution to the local environment and this has improved over the years. It is clear that the university regards the economic, cultural, and social relevance of the activities developed as a relevant part of its mission. There are several examples that the university's contribution in its fields of expertise is recognised locally and nationally (e.g. General Urban Plan of Bucharest). During the evaluation process the team observed that the university is perceived by many external stakeholders as having a very positive contribution to the local environment. Moreover, the team identified a general perception that this has improved and that the university has been trying to strengthen its links with external actors.

An important part of this positive image is due to the fact that graduates from the university have a good reputation among employers and that UAUIM is perceived as providing a solid open-minded, and balanced education. Moreover, during the visits and through the self-evaluation report, the team identified several positive examples of collaborations including internships, joint projects, and recruitment of graduates.

In the discussions that took place during the evaluation, the team felt that there was limited systematic discussion with external stakeholders regarding programme design and content. More feedback could be drawn from relevant actors such as alumni and employers. This broader consultation seems even more relevant in view of the changing outlook in the labour market for graduates in the fields of architecture and urbanism, and the university may benefit from drawing insights from employers about diverse future employment paths and their implications for the profile of future graduates.

One of the areas where the university is also starting to take initial, but promising steps, is in its relationship with its alumni. The Alumni Association is very recent and therefore largely unexplored as a vehicle to link with external stakeholders, though the potential is significant.

The university has a longstanding and prominent tradition in the field of architecture and this provides an important foundation to develop an extensive and fruitful collaboration with its networks of alumni. The team considers that this requires a much greater effort and institutional support in order to provide an important return for the life of UAUIM, and that



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the university should face this not merely as a potential source of additional revenue to deal with short-term financial constraints, but more as a long-term relationship.

Alumni can be a source of support and feedback for the university's activities and can help the university to develop its mission more effectively. Alumni can also provide an important network for the dissemination of lifelong learning activities. Regarding this aspect, and although there are some initiatives, the role of the university in continuing education and lifelong learning is still very limited and it can be significantly improved through a stronger partnership with alumni.

As is the case of many other European universities, the team formed a general perception that the relationship with the outside community could still be improved. Many existing collaborations seem to be the result of individual ad-hoc initiatives, often taking place outside the institutional channels. Although this is often a privileged vehicle in the development of interactions, the experience of many institutions indicates that it is not necessarily the most adequate for an institution that wants to regard this dimension of service to society as an important part of its activities. If UAUIM wishes to regard the development of the so-called third mission as a major part of its mission, it needs to make a stronger institutional commitment to those activities that can encourage, help, and sustain individual and institution-led initiatives.

In accordance with these observations the team recommends that UAUIM:

- UAUIM should enhance the importance of lifelong learning and continuing training.
- The university should explore the alumni networks for funding, feedback, graduate placement, and continuing education.
- UAUIM should promote a more institutional approach regarding collaborations with society.
- The university should structure further its relationship with the external stakeholders.



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6. Quality culture

In recent years quality has become a growing concern in higher education for policy makers and institutions. This has led to a rise in quality assurance mechanisms that aim both at self-improvement and accountability purposes. In many countries, regulators have placed increasing demands on universities regarding quality issues and the need to make more explicit their daily commitment to permanent quality improvement. Therefore, one of the major aims of the IEP process is to help institutions to develop a stronger quality culture.

During the several interviews with various groups of both university members and various stakeholders, the general perception was that more attention is being paid to quality enhancement among Romanian universities. In the case of UAUIM the team thinks that the university presents significant awareness regarding quality and accreditation. This has been fostered by previous national and international experiences with accreditation and quality assessment processes.

One of the first steps for an institution to develop an effective quality system is to know what is happening and how it is happening and UAUIM has demonstrated good capacity to document its activities. All the relevant information was, in general, available and with sufficient level of detail. This is certainly an important step in building a quality culture. Moreover, the previous experience of the university with other processes of quality assessment has also helped the institution in dealing with the demands of the IEP evaluation.

The growing prominence of debates on quality in higher education policy has led universities to document their activities more effectively and in greater detail, though it has not necessarily stimulated significant analysis of the data produced. Nevertheless, it is less clear to what extent this influences strategic and management decisions at UAUIM. This is a pervasive problem faced by many universities, due to the fact that governments and national agencies ask for extensive efforts to collect extensive data and stimulate an accountability attitude rather than an improvement one. Hence, data are used to a limited extent in supporting and framing internal decision-making and the definition of priorities.

The multiplication of evaluation processes also poses some risks, notably that of eroding the institutional actors' commitment and confidence in the effectiveness and relevance of those processes. During several meetings the team identified some doubts about the real impact of these evaluation procedures and feedback. Moreover, part of this apparent scepticism had been enhanced by the fact that the university was recently involved in multiple processes. The team hopes that the closure of this recent cycle of evaluations may help the university to focus its energies in pursuing its implications in a more continuous and reflexive way.

The team thinks it is very important that the university re-evaluates the adequacy and effectiveness of some of its current mechanisms of quality assessment. Some years ago the



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university established a Quality Commission that has done valuable work. However, its role has been rather limited given its resources and mandate. Therefore, the university needs to rethink the capacities and mandate of this group in order to make its role more effective and visible across the university.

Another important aspect regarding the development of a quality culture refers to the way quality issues pervade the different activities of the university. Rather than the fulfilment of certain rules and requirements, quality assurance is expected to infuse the attitudes of the different actors. One of the dimensions in which this is particularly important refers to the teaching mission, which is particularly valued by UAUIM. The team noticed that pedagogical training and other staff development tools do not seem to be available in the university, except in the case of new staff members. Thus, those interested often need to go elsewhere and get funding themselves. Despite the existing limitations, this is an area that could benefit from greater attention from the university's leadership by making those opportunities more available to those staff members interested in enhancing their professional skills. This should privilege a soft approach rather than the pursuit of an administrative obligation or imposition.

The development of a quality culture aims at gathering feedback from multiple stakeholders and improving their perceptions about the university. This is an important development in moving from a paradigm of quality development focused on public accountability to quality development as a multidimensional tool to monitor and improve the relationship between the university and its multiple internal and external communities. The team identified efforts in collecting feedback from some important stakeholders such as employers and alumni and encourages the UAUIM to pursue further these activities.

Overall, the team considers that the university has developed several aspects contributing to a quality system that may assess and enhance all its various missions. Important advances have been taken in this regard, although there is room for improvement. The scale, the cohesiveness, and the atmosphere prevailing at UAUIM creates a favourable environment for the university to explore the possibilities of seeing quality assessment less as a mechanism of public accountability, but more as an instrument of self-improvement to enhance the university's commitment to education, research, and service to society.

In accordance with these observations the team recommends that:

- Quality assessment should be especially understood as a tool for institutional and individual improvement.
- Quality Assurance should also be regarded as a supporting tool for better management.
- Greater attention should be devoted to staff development management and the mentoring of younger academic staff.
- Formal mechanisms should have consequences and adequate measures should be taken if necessary.



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- The Quality Commission should be empowered regarding its resources and mandate.



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7. Internationalisation

Internationalisation is one issue that has attained increasing visibility among European universities' strategic priorities. Many institutions have been striving to attain greater internationalisation through training and research activities. The current trends in higher education clearly underline this necessity and the move towards a more integrated higher education framework in Europe is only a more visible development of a broader and deeper trend. Hence, growing mobility among students and staff is likely to become a central issue for many universities, especially within the European Higher Education Area.

The UAUIM regards internationalisation as an important strategic objective in its development and in fulfilling its mission. This institutional commitment has led the university to participate in several important international networks and activities, namely in the fields of architecture and urbanism, and shows a visible commitment to expand internationalisation in its teaching activities. The university also sees the internationalisation of its activities as a competitive advantage regarding other local and national universities.

The team identified a willingness to strengthen the institutional commitment to internationalisation in several of the activities of UAUIM. The university has been trying to expand its educational supply in foreign languages, namely as a mechanism to overcome the language barrier for foreign students. The university has also started making efforts to tackle some of the internationalisation developments such as foreign language programmes.

However, the team identified a limited exploration of the current activities of internationalisation. The participation of students in internationalisation activities seems rather limited. This has been hindered both by financial issues and by limited programme and curricular flexibility. Although the university has a limited capacity to address the former, it certainly can do more regarding the latter issues. The team also observed a limited internationalisation of staff and research activities and considers that the current involvement of the university in several international networks has the potential to improve that situation significantly.

Internationalisation should not be merely the result of individual initiatives and needs a significant institutional engagement to support and promote internationalisation activities more deeply in making internationalisation a strategic objective. Despite the current difficulties and limitation, UAUIM has the capacity to make internationalisation an important dimension of its institutional life and several of the recent steps in that direction should encourage the University to move decisively along that route.

In accordance with these observations the team recommends that:



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- UAUIM should strengthen the dissemination of information among students about international opportunities.
- The university should strengthen academic staff's language skills in order to promote a more effective internationalization.
- UAUIM should explore the potential provided by international networks regarding doctoral training and research activities.
- The university should promote the internationalisation of academic staff and doctoral training more extensively.
- The university should reflect on how to make its programmes more internationally oriented regarding the length and flexibility of its structure to current patterns in the European Higher Education Area.



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8. Conclusion

The convergence of the international, national and regional challenges described in the introduction and throughout this evaluation report has made this a timely occasion to reflect on the current situation of UAUIM, the challenges ahead, and to propose some possible initiatives to successfully overcome them. The team appreciates the significant effort undertaken by UAUIM in performing this exercise and would like to commend the leadership of the university for taking the institution through this process of self-discovery and analysis with conviction and transparency.

However, the team hopes that the process will not end here. The main challenge now will be to use the diagnosis developed during this process to address the perceived weaknesses and challenges. UAUIM is a well-established and consolidated institution and the team considers that the university can build on its visible strengths to be bolder and more ambitious. Hence, the team has attempted to develop an extensive list of recommendations that it regards as adequate given the importance and potential of UAUIM for its region and for the Romanian higher education system. The team is confident that UAUIM has the potential to become a more visible player in the European Higher Education Area and hopes that these recommendations may contribute to help the UAUIM to develop an ambitious agenda of change and improvement that can build on its long history and strong traditions in order to develop a successful strategy for its future.

The team is aware that UAUIM faces significant challenges and constraints, namely those imposed by the national context, but it is confident that the university will have the capacity to face the current uncertainty and constraints. The team believes that the university will be capable of continuing recent efforts in order to develop a strong quality culture. The team hopes that this evaluation process has helped UAUIM sharpen its vision explicit and to foster stronger participation and collective responsibility.

Despite the aforementioned constraints, the team believes that the university should explore further its present autonomy, in order to consider possible scenarios to take advantage of the emerging opportunities in the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. We hope this evaluation process will be an important contribution in this respect, as a point of departure for a stronger focus on quality development in collaboration with students, administrative and teaching staff, alumni and external partners.



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Main recommendations:

1) Governance and decision-making

- UAUIM should develop strategies to deal with current uncertainty and explore existing limited autonomy.
- The team encourages the university to pursue a flexible and adaptive approach to medium-term planning in order to accommodate its challenging and unstable context.
- The university should aim at exploring fully the institutional potential of more recent fields and combine their strengths with the ones of the more established field of architecture;
- Important bodies, such as the Senate, should communicate their activities more effectively and widely.

2) Teaching and learning

- UAUIM should reflect about greater flexibility and adaptability regarding degree programmes and curricula by looking at the current developments in the EHEA and their potential relevance.
- The university should develop supporting mechanisms that may help academic staff whenever they feel the need to update their teaching skills and techniques.
- Efforts should be made for a greater use of ICT in supporting access to information and its effective and timely circulation.
- Greater attention should be devoted to improve some facilities (such as libraries and students' services), within the existing financial limitations.
- UAUIM should reflect on the financial and educational viability of its Sibiu branch, namely by balancing costs and resources and how it contributes to its strategic goals in the short and longer term.

3) Research

- There is a need to reflect on the missions of the Doctoral Council and school and their role within the university.
- UAUIM should pursue further its efforts to enlarge the number of potential supervisors.
- UAUIM should stimulate greater interaction between the Doctoral school and the research centres.
- Strengthening doctoral education is also important regarding the future quality of education in all the fields covered by the university.
- There is a need to identify priority areas and to nurture them in order to be more focused, more effective and efficient in research.



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- UAUIM should strengthen the role of research centres and their selectivity regarding priorities and eligibility.
- The university should strengthen the role of the research office, especially in finding and disseminating information about potential funding opportunities.
- UAUIM should promote greater coordination and guidance of research efforts, capabilities and project applications.

4) Service to society

- UAUIM should enhance the importance of lifelong learning and continuing training.
- The university should explore the Alumni networks for funding, feedback, graduate placement, and continuing education.
- UAUIM should promote a more institutional approach regarding collaborations with society.
- The university should structure more its relationship with the external stakeholders.

5) Quality Culture

- Quality assessment should be especially understood as a tool for institutional and individual improvement.
- Quality Assurance should also be regarded as a supporting tool for better management.
- Greater attention should be devoted to staff development management and the mentoring of younger academic staff.
- Formal mechanisms should have consequences and adequate measures should be taken if necessary.
- The Quality Commission should be empowered regarding its resources and mandate.

6) Internationalisation

- UAUIM should strengthen the dissemination of information among students about international opportunities.
- The university should strengthen academic staff's language skills in order to promote a more effective internationalisation.
- UAUIM should explore the potential provided by international networks regarding doctoral training and research activities.
- The university should promote more extensively the internationalisation of academic staff and of doctoral training.
- The university should reflect on how to make its programmes more internationally oriented regarding the length and flexibility of its structure to current patterns in the European Higher Education Area.