

Promjene u akademskoj profesiji: odgovor na izazove u društvu?

Changes in Academic Profession: A response to Societal Challenges?

- research results summary - EUROAC -

In recent years an increased interest in challenges placed before the higher education can be observed in both public and professional discourse. An increase in higher education population, the globalization and internationalization of higher education, overall decrease of public funding for higher education, the questions of autonomy and responsibility of universities, different and often divergent and contradictory expectations of higher education maintained by various stakeholders, are only some of the challenges facing higher education.

These, and other challenges facing higher education, are placed before the stakeholders responsible for performing traditional, revised or new roles of higher education: academic profession.

This book reveals a part of the results of the academic profession research performed within the framework of EUROCORES program EuroHESC (Higher Education and Social Change) of the European Science Foundation. One of the 4 collaborative research projects within the EuroHESC program was the project entitled “The Academic Profession in Europe: Response to Societal Challenges” (EUROAC). Groups of scientist from 8 countries participated in this project, including one research team from Croatia. Every national team included in the EUROAC project had its own national project which was integrated within the scope of one basic theme – academic profession and its response to social expectations – but it reflected characteristics specific to the scientific interest of each national team.

A review of scientific interests within the scope of the academic profession theme, reveals that the Croatian EUROAC research team opened a new area of research under this project, both on national and international scene, with the theme of their national project entitled “Academic Profession and Social Expectations: Challenges for University Civic Mission.”

Essential assumption, upon which the national research of the Croatian team is based, is the idea that the academic knowledge should contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the (local) community and influence the development of the civic society as well as the processes of democratization. Fundamental research question of the Croatian project was centred on exploring what kind of attitudes members of the academic profession maintain on the university civic mission and their role in it, both of which were examined thought the scope of

their research activities, teaching and activities in the community. A prominent place in the research was secured for the research of attitudes of the members of the academic profession on the sustainable development concept and its integration it teaching and research.

It is important to mention that, apart from working on their specific theme within the framework of the EUROAC project, Croatian team was also included in the international comparative research of changes in the academic profession (CAP – Changing Academic Profession) which is being implemented since the year 2007. Croatian national team implemented the CAP research using (modified) international research instruments and as a result of their participation 354 examinees was registered in the international CAP base which is a significant contribution for Croatia.

Within the scope of their work on the EUROAC project, and in addition to participating in the writing of three books by the international research team, Croatian team published four scientific works on the results of their work on the project. This book represents a kind of review of the work on the project, selected chapters of the research results, but the aim of it was not to present integral results due to the scope of the three-year work.

The book contains six chapters. First, introductory chapter gives a detailed review of Croatian research team progress on the EUROAC project and a short description of the following chapters. Next chapters reveal parts of the research results of the project and are written so that readers can read them as independent units. First chapter “Third civic mission challenges” deals dominantly with the theme of the national EUROAC project and reveals basic consensus and disagreement points in defining as well as in the explaining of the third mission concept. Next chapter entitled “Sustainable development and university”, deals with the question of how to initiate the integration of sustainable development issues on universities. The most comprehensive chapter of the book entitled “University teachers and community service,” displays the data collected within the project “Changes in Academic Profession - CAP” on the total sample of 17,745 teachers/examinees from twelve European countries. Since the questionnaire used in the research did not contain separate part on the academic activities of community service, its authors analysed various elements from the questionnaire that can be viewed as belonging within the scope of “community service”.

The following chapter entitled “What society expects from the academic community: university teachers’ perspective” displays part of the qualitative research results implemented in eight European countries which participated in the collaborative EUROAC research. The total sample of this research contained 497 examinees and the data were collected using the standardized interview. This

work, which represents the analysis of one part of the research material, analyses university teachers' perspectives on the expectations the society has of them. The final chapter – “Academic profession and the contribution to the development of the community and the society” – reveals the results of the qualitative research performed during the work on the EUROAC project. Authors of the work analyse the research material which reveals the perception of the university teachers on their role as academics in the contribution to the development of the community and the society, on the activities they should/ought to perform to bring about the contribution in question, on the activities outside teaching and research that they are getting involved in and on the status of their community service in the context of institutional strategies for validation of such activities.

In an attempt to sum up the results displayed in this book, it can be concluded that members of the academic profession, despite having positive opinion on the university civic mission in general, still reveal serious challenges facing the integration of the third civic mission in teaching and research activities. That implies that the integration in question mostly depends on the attitudes of university teachers on the values and principles of the civic mission, that is, on their individual assumptions and understanding. However, institutional strategies of encouraging civic mission can still be observed and the research results show that they result in the increased participation of teachers in the university civic mission activities. This confirms the research results which revealed the academic profession as one “under pressure” which responds to different challenges from the environment. However, the research results further show that institutional pressures towards academic profession still remain largely in the scope of teaching and research, and that various institutions of higher education – depending on their environment – increase the pressure towards the members of the academic profession in various areas of their activities, yet the integration of the civic mission and of the sustainable development concept in teaching and research still remain on the margins of the institutional strategies, in the area of personal attitudes and values of the members of the academic profession.

Despite the efforts invested in harmonisation, research results displayed in this book point to an exceptional diversity regarding the higher education in Europe, both on the level of separate countries and on the level of separate institutions of higher education, and confirm that members of the academic profession work in exceptionally dynamic conditions. Integration of civic mission and sustainable development concept in Croatia, but not only in Croatia, is a form of *terra incognita* which includes many doubts, dilemmas, even contradictory attitudes on the need of its integration in the educational policies (at different levels). Despite that, the conclusion is that the duty of the academic profession is to remain open, included in the social processes and to contribute to the development of the society and the

community outside the borders of their “ivory towers”. That is the only way they will be able to respond to the social challenges placed before them.