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*GLOBALIZING WORLD: RESPONSE IS GLOBALIZING HIGHER
EDUCATION*

**GLOBALIZUJĄCY SIĘ ŚWIAT A GLOBALIZACJA KSZTAŁCENIA
NA POZIOMIE UNIWERSYTECKIM**

Key words: role of higher education, joint courses, strategies

Słowa kluczowe: rola wykształcenia wyższego, wspólne wykłady, strategie

Abstract. In the Central European countries, one of the great challenges of the 21st Century is – concerning agriculture, too – the qualification of specialists working in the sector and their ability to meet the changing production and market requirements. Specialists with good command of foreign languages, equipped with high-level agricultural and economic knowledge and skills are required for the integration of the new member countries into the international economy and trade. The different forms of cooperation between institutions, stretching over the nations' borders can be a good response to this need. In the spring of 2008, four institutions from the Visegrád countries – involved in agricultural economist training – signed an agreement to start a joint training course in English. These institutions are: the Faculty of Economics and Management, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Warsaw University of Life Sciences (Poland), Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague and the School of Economics and Social Sciences, Szent István University Gödöllő (Hungary). The aim of the presentation is to outline the advantages of a multicultural English training course for the students and its contribution to the success of the participating higher education institutions.

Introduction

As regards Europe, the general feature of processes going on in higher education was the shift to the multi-level training, which has not been finished in the Central Eastern European countries yet. This shift has raised a lot of questions, especially in the field of economic training. On the first level of two-cycle model (BA, BSc level), the students get less special professional knowledge and the role of practical training has increased which puts new tasks in front of educational institutions. The declared objective of continuing studies at master level (MA, MSc) is to invite a limited group of students and give them more thorough basic knowledge.

As the result of the Bologna process there were 75 higher education institutions (universities, colleges) in Hungary in 2008.

Considering the Hungarian conditions, the number of admissions for master training courses (full-time and paid) announced for the academic year 2009-2010 was limited in 21 700 persons, that is one-third of the students finishing the first level. As regards the previous year, there are some data available for describing the situation of master training. According to them, in 2008, 66 higher educational schools announced 197 master training courses, but only 90 courses could be actually launched due to the low number of applicants. Unfortunately, in many places the master courses started with such a low number of students that cost-efficient training could not be realised. Altogether 4205 students started master studies. (About 17% of students started their studies in the frames of full-time, state-financed training) [www.felvi.hu, 2008].

The place of agricultural higher education

Agricultural higher education in Hungary is performed in 7 universities and 4 colleges, while economic sciences are taught in 12 universities and 19 colleges. In agricultural training the limit of admissions for state-financed full-time courses was 1900 students in 2009/2010, while in economic training this limit was 5900 heads. In the field of agricultural training, 84,9% of students started their studies at Bachelor level and only 5 % went to Master level [www.felvi.hu, 2008, Herneckzy

et al. 2009] According to the number of institutions participating in the training, these limit numbers can project low student numbers in some of the institutions. Considering the permanent decline of number of students applying to higher education, the competition for the students and for the financial sources is accelerating between institutions, and those special extra things are becoming important which highlight quality and distinction. On the other side the role of higher education in agricultural economics is relevant and it must be taken into consideration by all researchers who work in the field of agricultural economics. [Szabó 2000, Takács 2001]

SZIU

The Szent István University (SZIU) was founded in 2000 during the integration process within higher education. Since then the university has gone through several structural changes. At present training is offered at 9 schools. The institution has kept its ties to the agricultural sector, but it is quite open to economic training, too. The former, mainly agricultural type of courses, which concentrated on crop production, animal husbandry and veterinary sciences, has been significantly extended by today and involved rural development, environmental protection and technical sciences, as well as arts and economic sciences.

The following schools belong to the University:

- School of Applied Art,
- School of Veterinary Medicine,
- Institute of Health Studies and Environmental Health,
- School of Economics and Social Sciences,
- School of Economic Studies,
- School of Engineering,
- School of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences,
- School of Pedagogy,
- Ybl Miklós School of Architecture and Civil Engineering,
- School of Water and Environmental Management.

During the almost ten years since its foundation, the Szent István University has gained reputation at home and abroad through the courses offered by its schools. The university emphasizes quality training, the qualifications it gives provide the graduates with good chances to find good jobs on the labour market. The location of Szent István University is exceptionally good: it is the only higher education institution in the Central Hungarian Region and it has schools in the capital and beyond the borders of the region, too. Gödöllő is located at a central geographical place that is easy to reach by different means of transport. The lovely surroundings and cultural traditions of the city also support the development of an internationally approved, multidisciplinary university centre. The quick economic development, the high number of modern companies enable the mutual utilization of advantages from the coexistence of the university and the region.

According to a comprehensive research made last year on all the higher education institutions of Hungary, the Szent István University and its School of Economics and Social Sciences received the fourth and fifth place in the ranking. This was the outcome of the comparison of about eighty universities and colleges that include about 180 university and college schools. The research covered the qualification and expertise of faculty staff, the courses offered to the students and the applicability of the knowledge obtained by the students.

The Szent István University and the School of Economics and Social Sciences (SZIE) has wide range of international relations, the presence of foreign students studying at our school provides a sound basis for building up an international universitas from the institution [Diploma 2008]. Starting from the basis that has been built up for decades the objective is to turn the Szent István University and the agricultural economist training into the main training and research institute of rural sciences in Hungary. Our school intends to provide the widest and latest knowledge to traditional agricultural sciences. Turning into the third millennium, the concept of value-producing work has changed, the economic and social sciences have gained more importance, the knowledge has become a key element in globalized agricultural production and success [Neely et al. 2004, Dinya 2005].

Table 1. Szent István University School of Economics and Social Sciences, number of students on 1 October, 2008

Training level	Course	Field of training	Full-time			Correspondence*			Distance education**		Total	
			State -financed	Non-subsidized	Total full-time	State financed	Non-subsidized	Total corresponding	Non-subsidized	State financed	Non-subsidized	State financed
Former type of university and college course	agricultural economist	agricultural	258	5	263		169	169		258	174	
	farm business economist	economic	200	166	366		390	390		200	556	
	human resources manager	economic				1	496	497	229	1	725	
BA/BSc training	agribusiness and rural development engineer	agricultural	114	29	143		26	26		114	55	
	agricultural computing and public administration manager	agricultural	34	3	37		0	0		34	3	
	vocational agricultural instructor	agricultural				3	20	23		3	20	
MAM/Sc training	farm business and management	economic	179	226	405		295	295		179	521	
	trade and marketing	economic	74	156	230		84	84		74	240	
	finance and accounting	economic	34	11	45		28	28		34	39	
	human resources	economic	64	91	155		168	168	155	64	414	
	rural development and agribusiness	agricultural	1	1	2		5	5		1	6	
Specialized postgraduate training	regional and environmental economics	agricultural					10	10		0	10	
	management and leadership	economic	18		18		99	99		18	99	
	marketing	economic	19	2	21		65	65		19	67	
	finance	economic	7		7		22	22		7	22	
	international economy and business	economic					32	32		0	32	
Total agricultural:	MBA in Hungarian	economic					75	75		0	75	
	MBA in English	economic					18	18		0	18	
	human management	economic					65	65		0	65	
All total:		407	38	445	3	230	233	0	410	268		
All total:		595	652	1247	1	1837	1838	384	596	2873		
All total:		1002	690	1692	4	2067	2071	384	1006	3141		
Total number of students											4155	

* - students attend courses at the weekends, ** - learn on the weekends and they pay for their education
Source: own calculation, admission data -[www.felvi.hu].

Some figures about the students of SZIE

The School of Economic and Social Sciences has been founded 20 years ago. At the beginning its main profile was the university-level agricultural economist training. The economic and social changeover in the early 1990s considerably affected the agriculture and food industry, too. It was the direct consequence of the process that the university graduates with the knowledge that was demanded by the former large-scale structure were not really welcome in the labour market. The high number of new small-scale and medium agricultural plants wanted experts with different knowledge and skills. The training profile of the school should have been changed, the result of which was that new courses were accredited in the field of economics and social sciences. 16% of students are involved in agricultural economist training while 84% participates in economic training. It should be noted, however, that the agricultural economist training remained a main line at the school. 60% of the state-financed students study in agricultural economist courses, while this proportion is only 17% among the students in economic training. This latter indicates the high risk of economic training both regarding the labour market opportunities of graduates and the potential number of students in the subsequent years (Table 2).

Table 2. Evaluation of V4 training course

Strengths	Weaknesses
– Openness in part of the teaching staff (Erasmus/CEEPUS training experiences)	– Staff is not equally prepared for teaching in foreign language
– Available infrastructure	– Lack of information about the training
Possibilities	Threats
– Inviting BA/BSc graduates from other institutions	– Drastic decline of student numbers
	– Accreditation of MA/MSc courses in English
	– Competitors in the market
	– Market saturation

Source: own study.

Role of foreign language training in the improvement of agricultural economist training

In our opinion, education today can only be successful if proper knowledge and good command of foreign languages is general among the students. Marketable qualification should be paired with fluency in at least one, but rather two foreign languages. One of the means to obtain up-to-date professional knowledge is the participation in foreign language training and study periods. It requires extra investment both on behalf of the student and the main institution, the returns on which can be received from the permanently steady number of students at the school.

The unified training and credit transfer system within the European Union has already created the possibilities for student mobility some ten years ago within the frames of ERASMUS/CEEPUS project. The project also provides additional financial support for the participating students, besides exemption from tuition fees. Since 2000, the Szent István University sends abroad 90-95 students annually. The number of incoming students is also increasing, at present there are 40-45 foreign students studying at the university.

General description of the Erasmus activities in SZIE

Erasmus scholarship became the synonym of CHANCE or POSSIBILITY among our students. Chance to measure ourselves, to compare our knowledge with those of other nationalities. Most of our outgoing students enjoy better infrastructure at the receiving institutions: 24-hours-open computer laboratories, nice student canteens, well-equipped lecture halls, stylish apartments. However, this can be balanced when only our students know the solution of a complex problem within the international team!

Erasmus provides SZIE with opportunities to widen cross-border co-operations by promoting mobility, improving transparency and academic recognition of studies and qualifications thro-

throughout Europe. We have been able to spend nearly 1.3 million EUR on more than 750 students since 2000. Our university has been using ECTS since 2001 and in accordance with the EU regulations our international committee has made a conscientious effort towards recognizing every course that has an equivalent subject at SZIE.

We strive to keep a balance in the numbers of incoming and outgoing students. As it is apparent from the statistics the number of incoming students in 2007-2008 shows a 7-fold increase compared to academic year 2000-2001. This significant increase in numbers is due to the strategically planned preparatory visits to less active areas and the good reputation disseminated by our former incoming students returning to their home institutions. Not only the number of our incoming students is growing rapidly, but five of our incoming students who studied at our university during the 2007-2008 year have returned as regular fee-paying students to our Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences in this academic year to finish their Agricultural Engineering BSc degree, one of the seven degree courses accredited and offered in English at the faculty.

Role of bilateral and multilateral training courses in the development of agricultural economist training

The extension of variety of foreign language courses is absolutely necessary. It should include the presentation of subjects in foreign languages, the approval of subjects studied abroad, the bilateral and multilateral trainings with foreign institutions and – in the most favourable case – the issue of joint degree.

There is a special training course started in 2008 among some partner universities of V4 countries. The cooperation involves the Szent István University School of Economics and Social Sciences (Gödöllő), the Faculty of Economics and Management (Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra), Faculty of Economics Sciences at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, and the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences at the Czech University of Life Sciences (Prague). The four institutions offer Master training in English for graduate BA/BSc students in the field of economics, agricultural economics and management. The students can start their studies following the successful MA/MSc admission procedure at the sending institutions, where they remain legally enrolled.

20 students, 5 from each country, can participate in the international group. During the training, the students spend the first semester in Nitra, the second semester in Warsaw, the third in Prague and the fourth in Gödöllő. All the students participating in the studies, shall obtain at least 30 ECTS credits in each partner university. At the end of the studies the students take the final examination at their home universities.

By the end of the training course, the students get a degree at their own (home) universities and a certificate about V4 studies proving their studies at the four institutions. It is a very valuable possibility to improve language knowledge, professional skills and expertise, as well as to obtain intercultural practical experiences which can be well utilized by the students participating in the project.

The first training course started in the Academic Year of 2008/2009 with the participation of 8 students. Since BA/BSc graduates have not received degree yet at the cooperating institutions, it was very difficult to recruit students for the first two years, but it is worth fighting this obstacle in order to develop the joint training in English with four institutions and four countries because it can be very attractive for a lot of students.

We are absolutely convinced that the offered international studies are very interesting for the students in V4 countries and help to improve education in Central Europe.

Discussion

It is true for the whole higher education, but especially for the economic and agricultural higher education in the region that it cannot be continued on the former basis, without any changes, because, on the one hand, the demand for graduates with this type of qualification is decreased and, on the other hand, the number of institutions where students are trained at least on BA/BSc level is increasing permanently. It is therefore inevitable that some schools revise their training strategies and find the gaps in the market where they can step in and utilize the opportunities.

The special training courses can offer break-through points and the strategies targeting quality and distinction can be means of success. In our opinion, V4 training course is one of the best means for all the participating institutions, students and teachers.

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Streszczenie

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