

Accreditation of music higher education in Lithuania (LMTA and VPU): general observations and recommendations of the experts

The lecture of the self-assessment reports and the site visit between September 20th and 25th was a fascinating experience for the AEC experts team and gave to them a valuable insight into the actual state of music higher education in Lithuania. First of all, we would like to thank the visited institutions for the usefulness and honesty of their reports and for the openness and quality of the discussions during the visit. We are also very grateful to the SKVC and to Daiva Buivydiene for the careful preparation and accompaniment of the process. Our only suggestion to the accreditation agency is to abandon the preliminary reports written before the visit on the basis of the self-assessment reports: they were clearly obsolete while confronted to the reality of discussions and concrete observations. The following observations should be taken as a free comment of professional music educators from Europe and USA on the present state of art in Lithuania, hopefully useful for the further internal political discussions and developments.

The musical higher education in Lithuania has been confronted to numerous cultural, educational, political and economical challenges since the fall of the Soviet Union.

The independence strengthened the cultural identity and a very rich national musical heritage, both in folk and art music (choir and dance culture, religious music, festivals, opera and orchestra life, etc). Later, the entrance of Lithuania into the EU brought numerous opportunities for networking and connecting as well as big reforms in higher education through the Bologna process and the new universities status.

On the other hand, the social status of art education and culture has changed during the same period as the state priorities moved to other directions, leading to less public funding for the institutions. As a result, the global picture our commission could take out of its visit is transitional : some excellent and high standing traditions from the older time are still working both in the education and in the cultural life, such as the preparation of young people for the artistic professions and the vivid concert and festival life, whereas one can feel that a partly aging teaching staff sometimes finds difficult to fit to the new social situation including new cultural challenges, international mobility and the like. The Bologna process should be seen as an opportunity to accompany these changes, to find the best way to articulate the local conditions and the international scene and to constantly check up the program objectives, relations and internal balances. We would like to pinpoint the useful AEC tools in this matter.

The LMTA has obvious strengths to play a major role both in and out of Lithuania: it has a strong artistic and pedagogical tradition and is also a global academy including music, dance, theatre and even cinema. This globality should be in our opinion better encouraged through original and interdisciplinary programs leading to a renewed identity. The composition department is in our view especially remarkable with its young staff, entrepreneur spirit and international connections and could play a key role in this respect.

Some weaknesses we could observed needs probably be addressed both on political and institutional ways : the quality of preparation of prospective domestic students immediately before entering higher education (the former segments seem to work better), the tracking of new students at home or abroad, the widening of stylistic scope from ancient historically informed music playing to

contemporary music of all kinds, the connections between the different departments of the LMTA (leading to a better feeling of being part of the same artistic community), the exploration of new artistic jobs (such as cultural mediators and community musicians), a better use of the available electronic tools (online libraries and e-learning), the search for alternative funding to balance the reduced state help (sponsors, EU programs etc.), the promotion of international mobility and the development of a strong alumni policy (links with the profession, quality control on the curricula, club of outstanding professionals and/or advocates for the LMTA the music sector, etc). Moreover, three items need to be specifically discussed:

- The new admission procedures are ill-fitted to higher music education since they put too much emphasis on the academic records instead of encouraging primarily artistically promising students. This could lead to severe quality damages and our commission strongly recommends re-examining this policy.
- The jobs of music artist and pedagogue are closely interrelated, and this interrelation should therefore be promoted already at the Bachelor level, leading to more specialised programs at the Master level. In other words, high artistic skills are crucial for an efficient and responsible teaching. Accordingly, our commission feels the assignation of music pedagogy regulations to the overall pedagogy regulations as potentially dangerous for this balance and recommends it is carefully monitored. This monitoring will also help to lift up structural ambiguities between Bachelor and Master levels in music pedagogy.
- The status of the Kaunas LMTA faculty must be questioned in terms of offer and relation to the Vilnius LMTA. Our commission has doubts about the implementation of the jazz section and recommends having a close look at its qualitative and quantitative growth in the next years. The efficiency and the level of the General Music Didactics program (notably on the Master level) must also be discussed and compared, for example, with the excellent standards of the VPU curriculum. Moreover, it appears that the Kaunas faculty suffers from being an annex to the LMTA, and not self-governing in some vital areas such as student admissions (the Kaunas faculty does not have necessarily the first choice of students, all the entrance examinations taking place in Vilnius) mobility, staff development and facilities. Our commission was very pleased to hear that, shortly after our visit, close links developed between the Kaunas faculty and the local universities. We think this is a very positive step, which could indeed go up to the discussion about a new independent structure.

Finally, we would like to recommend the institutions to be more proactive than reactive to the overall structural and academic changes. In this sense institutional statements as well as long-term strategies will doubtless prove to be useful.

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For the commission :

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