



CASE STUDIES

Bucharest, Romania, May 2013

The case study visit to Bucharest, Romania, took place in May 2013 and was hosted by the National University for the Arts, Bucharest with participation also from the "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism. The visit took place over two days and entailed a daylong seminar and visits to different sites and resources for artistic research within the University and across the city. Participants in the seminar who made presentations on their perspectives and experience with third cycle work in Romania included: Ruxandra Umestru (former rector of the Academy of Fine Arts); Roxana Trestioreanu (Lecturer and Head of the Department of Photography and Video at the University of the Arts, Bucharest); Alexandra Croitoru (third year doctoral researcher and Assistant Professor in the Department of Photography and Video of Bucharest University of Arts); and Professor Augustin Ioan of the University of Architecture and Urbanism.

We began with a presentation on current research by Alexandra Croitoru, who indicated the level of international recognition for her work – pointing to a recent award from Paris, and a very impressive record of international exhibition and residency, and also indicating that she recognized a certain ambivalence in parts of the wider art world to the question of artists pursuing doctorates. She also identified a tension with this international recognition and national resource levels, pointing to the challenges presented and the demands placed on her to self-finance her further studies, even though she was a teacher at the university with a well established international profile and very high reputational standing. The cost of fees per annum was identified as 500 euro; however, the monthly salary of a teacher in the university was indicated as approximately 300 Euros, indicating the relative expense of these fees within a Romanian context. This particular case opened a wider discussion on University financing and legislation change, and recent developments in research and doctoral financing. It was noted that from the mid-1990s onwards, when the Academies had been transformed into Universities, the demand for doctoral qualifications among higher arts educators had begun to become a key issue. It was noted that one former rector had reputedly resigned because he did not wish to pursue a PhD. The requirement that

all lecturers would have a PhD was introduced fully by the 2011 law. It was also noted however that there was a disconnect between these policies promoting the doctorate as a requirement of teaching, and the resources being provided to support the attainment of this policy goal. This was further complicated by instability in the policy regime with successive reforms and changes to university law and policy creating uncertainty and volatility in the system.

The participants pointed to the recent resignation of people from the country's National Research Council (CNCS), the main research funding agency in Romania, in protest over backdated cuts to previously approved research grants implemented by Romania's Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport. The cuts to 2013 budgets, by between 40 and 55 percent, were a shock for Romania's research communities, given their sudden announcement well into the year. In an open letter, dated April 9, 2013 sent to Prime Minister Victor Ponta, Minister of Education Remus Pricopie and Minister of Research Mihnea Costoiu, signed by hundreds of Romanian researchers, it has been alleged that "no justification was offered for either the general reduction in funds or for the uneven reduction between different types of projects."¹

The discussion then turned to the forma and processes around doctoral studies. It as noted that normally doctoral studies last 3 academic years, and within the University of the Arts there is a requirement to pursue structured educations in the first year of studies. The methodology of admission is set by each university, according to university autonomy, but is based on the general criteria elaborated by the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth. The admission to doctoral studies depends on the results of an admission competition organized annually by the University for its area of doctoral studies. Usually, the PhD admission contest is held in September before the beginning of the academic year. A candidate can participate in the admission contest for any field of doctoral studies regardless of the field in which he/she has received his/her bachelors or master's degree. In this respect UNAB methodology of admission both for Master and Doctoral studies underline the fact that for professional PhD candidates can only apply who has an art bachelor or master degree. (This is a university requirement not a national one.) The admission competition is held both for state-sponsored and self-sponsored applicants. The admission competition consists of one exam - a general examination. It includes a written text on subjects announced to the doctoral supervisor and an interview, in which the candidate presents his/her proposal for the doctoral thesis. Through this examination the candidate proves his/her research abilities, general approach, ability to construct the relevant research bibliography, etc.

¹ http://www.ad-astra.ro/posts/view_post.php?post_id=2082&lang=en

Once admitted, an advanced academic training program and a scientific research programme are carried out under the guidance of a doctoral supervisor chosen by the candidate. The advanced training program has to be accomplished in the first two semesters of doctoral studies, and the doctoral student must achieve at least 30 transferable credits in each of the two semesters. The advanced academic training programme includes a disciplinary training module in the doctoral student's field of expertise and a complementary training module. It was noted that the content for some of these courses emerged from the doctoral researchers' own topics, but also in critical response to wider cultural developments, such as nationalism. Within the disciplinary training module, the doctoral student must attend in total 3 to 4 courses from the doctoral school's academic curriculum, during the two semesters of the advanced academic training programme. Within the complementary training module, the doctoral student must also elaborate on a project plan for the doctoral thesis, under the guidance of the doctoral supervisor. The plan and the research skills acquired by the doctoral student within the advanced academic training programme are evaluated by an examination board with the doctoral supervisor as president. This first structured phase of study ends with the public presentation of the PhD plan by the doctoral student.

The format of doctoral submission was still seen as something open, and subject to the judgment of the individual researcher (in dialogue with supervisors), however, a combination of written submission and body of practical work was seen as typical, having emerged from a long period of internal debate, when a decade previously the norm was more often seen as a traditional academic written submission.

In terms of numbers, it was noted that the doctorate was seen as primarily a qualification for academic careers, a requirement for teaching, and that this had increased numbers a lot in recent years. Currently there are 100 doctorands in the University of the Arts, and a recruitment of at least 15 per year (and up to 30 per year) is foreseen.

International connectivity was an important theme. Prof. Augustin Loan described a very important example, indicating how researchers in Romania were active leaders in networks and brokering relationships both within and outside Europe. The e-archidoc project² (an Erasmus Lifelong Learning supported project 2007-10) was a tool developed by a partnership of 14 European Schools of Architecture aimed at the creation of a collaborative post-master educational virtual environment, which that sought to support third-cycle programmes by: offering distance-learning e-modules; enhancing the attractiveness of research educations through international partnerships; facilitating researchers to keep working and collaborating virtually in cases where for financial or other reasons/commitments, researchers could not prolong their stay in the city/country of those institutions; developing virtual international doctorate

² <http://www.e-archidoc.eu>

committees to be supervised through e-meetings; creating common assessment criteria and qualifications for doctoral studies in architecture; and creating a network of post-master researchers through direct contacts over the Internet. Prof. Augustin also discussed the role of his University in building exchange and dialogue in Senegal (building upon a shared access to Francophone culture by Romania - based on linguistic proximity- and Senegal - based on a history of colonisation), pointing to the different perspectives on internationalisation that came from Romania's positioning and historical trajectory through communism post-WWII. All the participants indicated the importance of an internationalised research culture that was oriented not just to Western Europe (UK, France, Germany, and Austria) and to North America, but also to Southern and Eastern Europe, and to parts of Western Asia, parts of North Africa and parts of South America.