

Binary Higher Education System In The Republic Of Croatia With Emphasize On The Professional Higher Education

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Abstract

In the Republic of Croatia, higher education is performed through university and professional studies. University studies are performed at universities and professional studies are performed at polytechnics and schools of professional higher education primarily, but they can be performed at universities also, with the prior consent by National Council for Higher Education. Professional study has two levels which are professional study that last two to three years and specialist professional graduate study that last one to two years. There are currently 104 public higher education institutions, 11 of them are polytechnics and 3 are schools of professional higher education. Also there are 28 private higher education institution, 4 of them are polytechnics and 22 are schools of professional higher education. It is interesting to mention the fact from Central Bureau of Statistics in the Republic of Croatia, according to which, in the academic year 2014/15 enrolled 157,827 students from which the largest number of students were enrolled in university studies (68,97%). Here can be raised the legitimate question why there is so much difference between professional and university studies in the registered number of students and whether the reasons can be found in a lack of awareness of students or the unattractive study programs. The aim of this paper is to show the binary higher education system, kinds of professional studies in the Republic of Croatia and the possible reasons that students still prefer to choose a university study for their education.

Keywords: Higher education system, professional studies

Introduction

In the normative definitions of human rights on Higher Education (in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental

Rights of the European Union) the most often emphasizes is that higher education must be accessible to all on the basis of "competences". This definition of the right to higher education is included in the Croatian Constitution and Article 66 states "under equal conditions, secondary and higher education is available to everyone in accordance with his abilities." Furthermore, the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education in its Article 77 contains anti-discrimination provision that all higher education institutions must ensure entry to the "way to guarantee equality of all applicants regardless of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, social status, disability, sexual orientation and age" (Farnell, 2004)⁴. Croatian higher education system was under the reform in 2003 and legal framework was set. Bologna process introduced in Croatia binary system with emphasize on professional studies in way that those studies should be closer to citizens in a way of opening polytechnics and schools of professional higher education in smaller cities (Vukovar, Gospić, Knin...).

Legal framework of the higher education system:

Croatian education system is managed by the Ministry of Sciences, Education and Sports (MSES). It is the main administrative body responsible for planning, monitoring and funding of Croatian higher education system. MSES is collaborating with a number of other higher education bodies specialized for particular higher education issues. One of them is Agency for Sciences and higher education (ASHE). ASHE was modelled after the best European practices in quality assurance in sciences and higher education. Also there is Agency for Mobility and EU Programs.

Higher education in the Republic of Croatia is primarily regulated by the *Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education* (Official Gazette 123/2003, 105/2004, 174/2004, 2/2007, 45/2009, 63/2011, 94/2013, 101/2014 and 60/2015; hereafter: Act). That Act came into force in August

⁴“There are examples from many EU countries that are including the principle of equal opportunities and/or the social dimension into higher education acts. The French Education Act emphasizes the role of higher education in reducing the "social and cultural inequalities", while the Austrian Law on Universities mentions gender equality, equal opportunities and special attention to the needs of persons with disabilities as some of its fundamental principles. Spain particularly stands out as an example of good practice in its Education Act, which has a separate sub-section devoted to "equity in education." Even transition countries take these principles into account: the Hungarian Law on Higher Education mentions as one of the fundamental principles that of "widening opportunities to access higher education", and equal opportunities within the higher education system". More available on: Social dimension of higher education completely omitted from new laws; <http://www.iro.hr/en/infoservice/ide-news/press-releases/info-social-dimension-of-higher-education-completely-omitted-from-new-laws/>

2003 and has established a binary system, meaning that there are two types of higher education; university studies and professional studies. Also, there is *Act on Academic and Professional Titles and Academic Degrees* (Official Gazette 107/2007 and 118/2012) that was passed in 2007 and established system of qualifications for students graduating from Bologna study program and preparing framework for comparison between Bologna and pre-Bologna titles. The *Act on Quality Assurance in sciences and Higher Education* (Official Gazette 45/2009) was passed in 2009. It enabled complete autonomy of the ASHE in the external quality assurance processes in Croatia.

Types of Higher Education institutions:

Higher education institutions in Croatia are universities (along with their constituents- faculties and other legal entities), polytechnics and school of professional higher education.

Article 47 and 54 of the Act said that at each university, teaching and research is carried out by one of the constituent units of the university. *Faculties* organize and carry out university studies (may deliver professional studies also) and develop scientific research and professional work in one or more scientific and professional fields (Article 62, paragraph 1 of the Act). *University departments* participate in the implementation of study programs, develop scientific, artistic and professional work in a single field of science or in an interdisciplinary area of science and participate in the implementation of university studies (Article 64, paragraph 1 of the Act). *Art academies* organize and carry out university artistic studies (may deliver professional artistic studies also) and develop first-rate artistic creative endeavor and scientific research in arts (Article 62, paragraph 2 of the Act).

Polytechnics and schools of professional higher education are higher education institutions which deliver professional study programs. Polytechnics are those schools of professional higher education which deliver professional study programs in three or more scientific fields unlike schools of professional higher education which can deliver only one study program (Article 67, paragraph 1 and 2 of the Act).

Currently there are 132 higher education institutions in Croatia.

Table 1. Public and private higher education institutions

Public higher education institutions	No.	Private higher education institutions	No.
Public university	8	Private university	2
*constituent	82		
Public polytechnics	11	Private polytechnics	4
Public schools of professional higher education	3	Private school of professional higher education	22

Source: MOZVAG, Available on:

<http://mozvag.srce.hr/preglednik/pregled/hr/tipvu/odabir.html>

Table 1 shows that there is 8 public universities, 2 private universities, 82 constituents of the public universities, 4 private polytechnics, 11 public polytechnics, 22 private schools of professional higher education and 3 public schools of professional higher education. The large number of higher education institutions is mostly due to the fact that the four largest universities (Zagreb, Rijeka, Osijek and Split) are not integrated and their constituents are legal entities.

Cycles of Higher Education

In Croatian higher education system we have three cycles of higher education- undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate.

First cycle of higher education is delivered as professional or university study. The minimum educational requirement for admission into first cycles are set by higher education institutions. Normally, the minimum requirement for admission into first cycle is the completion of a four-year secondary school and students are obligated to State Mature. Undergraduate professional study usually last for three years in which students accumulate 180 ECTS. Upon completion students are awarded a professional title of *professional baccalaureus/baccalaurea* with a reference to specializations. Undergraduate university studies are leading to the title of *university baccalaureus/baccalaurea* and they have a duration of three to four years. Students holding a first cycle professional degree may apply for admission into specialist professional graduate studies, to a second cycle graduate university studies under special conditions (some extra exams) or enter the labor market. Students with university degree can apply for admission into graduate university studies, specialist professional graduate studies or enter the labor market. We can see that the first cycle gives almost the same opportunities for the students of both, professional and university studies.

Second cycle is delivered as graduate university study or specialist professional graduate study. Graduate university study normally last for two years in which students accumulate 120 ECTS. The total number of credits accumulated during first and second cycle is at least 300. Upon completion students are awarded with academic title *magistar/magistra* with reference to a specialization. Students holding a second cycle university degree can continue their studies at postgraduate university studies or enter the labor market. Specialist professional graduate study normally last for two years in which students accumulate 120 ECTS. Upon completion of specialist professional graduate studies students are awarded a document called diploma and the professional title *stručni specijalist/stručna specijalistica* in a certain field.

In Croatian higher education system we can find *programs outside the Bachelor and Master Structure*. This are integrated undergraduate and

graduate university study (first and second cycle) that normally last for five or six years in which students accumulate of 300 ECTS. Upon completion students are awarded with the academic title *magistar/magistra* with reference to a specialization. Students can continue their studies at postgraduate university studies or enter the labor market. There is one more program, postgraduate university specialist study that normally last one to two years (courses only). It is important to note that these kind of studies do not refer to doctoral (third cycle) studies. These are for employed persons who have already completed graduate university studies or graduate specialist professional study and wish to further their education in a certain field. Upon completion students are with the title of *university specialist* in a certain field.

Third cycle (PhD) can be delivered only by universities. The minimum educational requirement is the completion of an appropriate graduate university study. Normally it last for three years and upon completion students are awarded with the academic title *doctor of sciences* (*dr.sc*) in their field of sciences⁵.

Binary higher education system

In *binary or dual system* university studies are provided by universities and professional studies are provided by specialized institutions. That is the case, for example, in Lithuania, Estonia and Belgium. There are also *mixed systems* that do not make a clear-cut distinction between universities and other institutions so universities may offer professional studies or professional study institutions may offer university studies. Third option is *partial unitary system* where professional studies are provided by specialized institutions located within universities. That is the case in France and Slovenia. Last one is the *unitary system* in which all types of higher education are offered by the same institutions. Today in EU countries we cannot find an example for that system (Camilleri et al., 2014).

We consider Croatia to have a binary or dual education system, with one exception in which universities may deliver professional studies with the prior consent by National Council for Higher Education. Binary education system is the result of the comprehensive reform within the framework of the Bologna Process. In the 2005/06 academic year reformed study programs were introduced and students could no longer enroll in pre-Bologna programs. Higher education institutions are universities, polytechnics and schools of professional higher education. As we said, universities are primarily delivering university studies (but may deliver professional studies)

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EURYDICE, Available on:
https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Croatia:Higher_Education

and polytechnics and schools of professional higher education may deliver only professional studies.

Table 2. Number of study programs in Croatia

University studies 1130	Professional studies 242
Undergraduate university study 349	Short professional study 1
Integrated undergraduate and graduate study 52	Undergraduate professional study 167
Graduate university study 386	Specialist graduate professional study 74
Postgraduate specialist study 222	
Postgraduate university study 121	

Source: MOZVAG, Available on:
<http://mozvag.srce.hr/preglednik/pregled/hr/vrsta/odabir.html>

Tabel 2 shows that in the Croatia we can find 1372 study programs. There si 1130 university studies and 242 professional studies. The percentage of professional studies is 17,64% of all studies which is really small percentage.

Table 3. Professional studies at universities

University	Short professional study	Professional studies	Specialist graduate professional studies
University in Osijek	-	7	2
University in Pula	-	2	-
University Sjever	-	7	-
University in Dubrovnik	-	3	1
University in Rijeka	-	10	2
University in Split	-	16	8
University in Zadar	-	2	-
University in Zagreb	1	8	3
TOTAL:	1	55	16
		72 professional studies	

Source: MOZVAG, Available on:
<http://mozvag.srce.hr/preglednik/pregled/hr/vrsta/odabir.html>

Table 3 shows the number of professional studies taught at univerities. Universities may also deliver professional studies, but that should be an exception. It is interesting to see that 29,75% (72 professional study programs from 242 total) of all professional studies are delivered by universities. The intention of the first Act from 2003 was complete separation of professional and university studies. Universities were supposed, by the Act, to deliver only university studies and professional

studies left to polytechnics and schools of professional higher education. For the universities that would mean the loss of a number of students and with that some of the personnel. Biggest problem was that universities would lose a good part of the money proceeds from tuition fees of those students. Universities should not worry for too long. Constitutional Court found unconstitutional the Article of the Act which determine the deadline by which the universities could admit students to professional studies. That meant that universities could continue to deliver professional studies (Croatian Constitutional Court Decision, 2007). „The decision was explained by the fact that university education incorporates professional education as well, so every university meets requirements for the organisation, execution and implementation of professional studies. Inversely, professional studies do not incorporate university education, so no polytechnic or college meets the requirements for the organisation and implementation of university studies including doctoral studies“ (Ivančić et al., 2014).

University vs. professional studies – educational opportunities

The main difference between university and professional studies is for what that study will equip students. University studies equip students for work in science and higher education, in the business world, public sector and society and professional studies provide students with the knowledge and skills they will require to work in professional occupations. There is legitimate question is it really like mentioned. At the professional studies it is expected that students would have more practical training and lectures from experts in particular fields. However, as we can see, especially in the professional studies at universities, lecturers are held by professors teaching at university studies also. Literature on professional and university studies is often the same and the names of the colleges has been modified with the addition at professional studies of “introduction...” or “fundamentals...”. It is necessary to systematically initiate changes of study programs of professional studies and introduce the students of the final year of secondary education in the basic differences between professional and university studies.

Analyze of professional studies and students enrolled in these studies

In the winter semester of the 2014/2015 academic year, a total of 157 827 students enrolled in institutions of higher education. Out of the total number of students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the Republic of Croatia, 79.3% enrolled in faculties, 14.7% in polytechnics, 4.7% in schools of professional higher education and 1.3% in art academies. There were 71.9% of full-time and 28.1% of part-time students enrolled. The largest number of full-time students were enrolled in faculties, 83.4% of

them (6.5% in professional and 76.9% in university studies), 11.3% in polytechnics, 3.5% in schools of professional higher education and 1.8% in art academies.⁶ If we look at numbers we can see that there is 18 252 students on professional studies at universities and 30 486 at polytechnics and schools of higher professional education. We can find an explanation in this numbers for universities not wanting to let go of professional studies. Table 4 shows that number of students enrolled on institutions of higher education does not differ much. Percentage of students on professional studies in academic year 2014/2015 was 30,88%, in 2013/2014 it was 32% and in 2012/2013 it was 31,51%. We can see that university studies are much more attractive for students.

Table 4. Students enrolled on institutions of higher education

	2014/2015	2013/2014	2012/2013
Schools of professional higher education	7 360	10 660	9 601
Polytechnics	23 126	24 465	23 405
Faculties	125 258	124 743	125 074
University studies	107 006	107 557	107 603
Professional studies	18 252	17 186	17 471
Art academies	2 083	2043	2100
Total number of students	157 827	161 911	160 180

Source: authors review of data from Croatian Bureau of statistics

Conclusion

Croatian education system has passed a reform that was never completed by the end. There were good intentions of introducing complete binary system in which professional studies would be performed only by polytechnics or schools of professional higher education and university studies by universities. Such intent of the legislature has failed and we can see that all eight universities performed professional studies today. Now days, there is the idea of merging polytechnics and schools of professional higher education under the universities (as centers or constituents). If we look at other European countries that develop professional studies outside the universities, that would be the step backwards for the Croatian higher education system. It is required to make revision of study programs of professional studies, higher hourly rate of professional practice for students and more lectures by experts. Percentage of students enrolled in professional studies at three last academic years was around 30%. In the European countries is notable rise in the number of students of professional studies, but in Croatia it is the same. The factors that determine increasing enrollment on

⁶ Students enrolled on professional and university study, winter semester of 2014/2015 academic year. Croatian Bureau of statistics, Number 8.1.7. Zagreb, 14th August 2015

professional studies are: duration of professional studies, lower costs of studying and better preparation for labor market. In Netherlands 65% of students are studying at professional studies and in Croatia 30%⁷. Higher education system has many qualities, but there is still a lot of room for improvement.

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