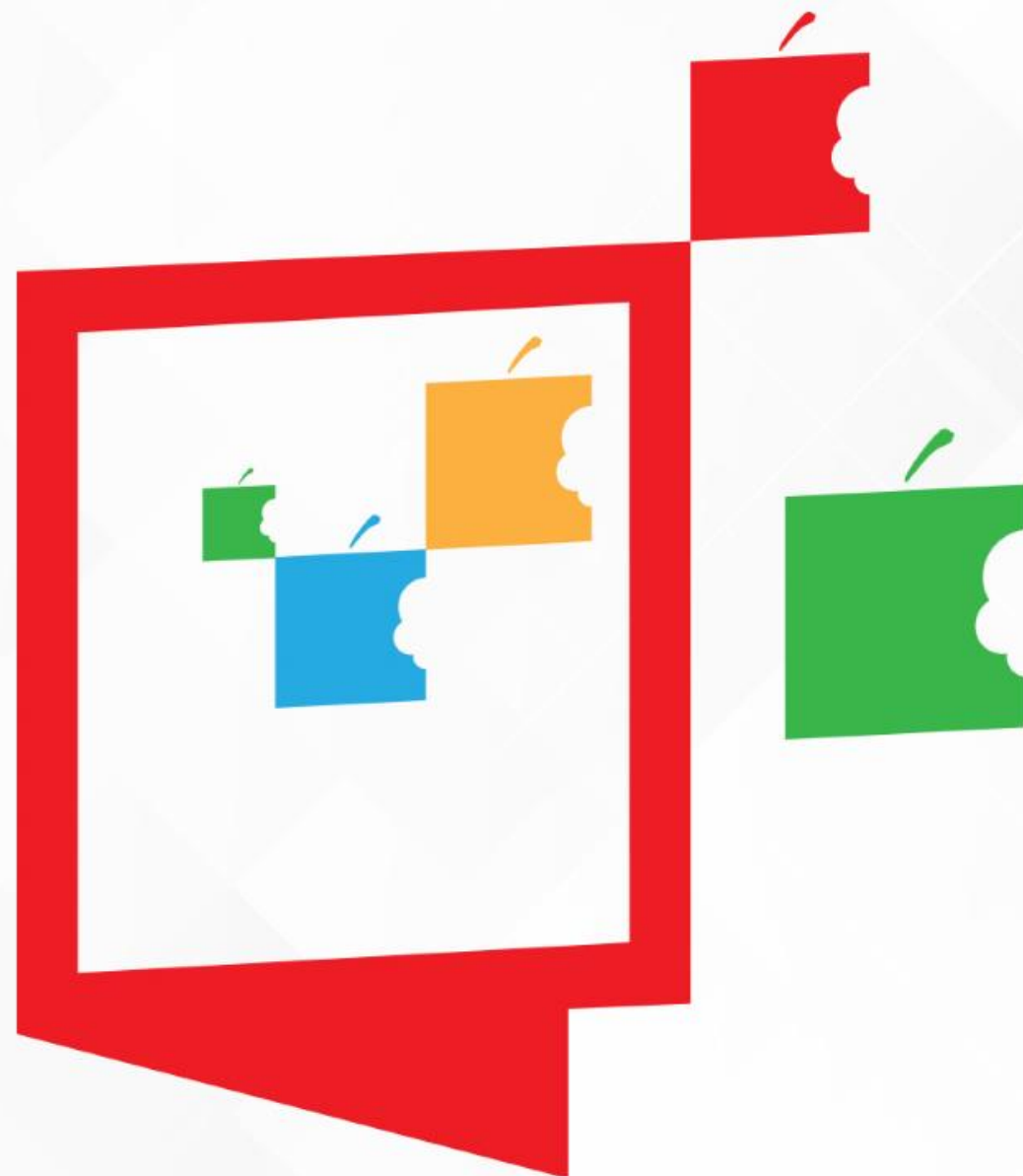# Rescuing a misinterpreted Bologna Reform
Quality Assurance of the Third Cycle in Croatia

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Improvement of quality assurance
and enhancement systems in higher education

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Croatian Higher Education system – before and after implementation of Bologna Declaration

- BEFORE Bologna Implementation:

    Diploma programme (4 yr) + Master study (up to 3 yr)

- AFTER Bologna Implementation (2001)

    Diploma programme changed into 3+2 or 4+1 scheme (B.A./B.S. & M.A /M.S.)

    - Research competences?

Croatian Higher Education system – before and AFTER IMPLEMENTATION OF BOLOGNA DECLARATION

- Bologna novelties and implementation issues:

1) Increase of teaching content at the lower levels of higher education

ISSUE - the burden of under/graduate programme teaching hours fell heavily on the PhD candidates (no valid Collective Agreement)

2) Filling the gap of student research competences by increasing the number of obligatory courses within the doctoral studies

ISSUE – Overwhelming number of courses and obligations

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Croatian Higher Education system – other issues

- **Tuition fees for most of bachelors and masters programs were abolished**

ISSUE – most of the funds are spent on paying teachers salaries rather than invested in research

- **Increased number of PhDs in Croatia:** 2.30 doctoral graduates per thousand in comparisone with the EU average (1.81 for 2012)

ISSUE: High unemployment rate in Croatia, few job opportunities outside academia, lack of national research grants

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Croatian Higher Education system – other issues

- MLAZ survey (2015): doctoral candidates are unsatisfied with the general quality of doctoral studies: *teaching skills, scientific work and entrepreneurial activity*

- Low mobility rates (international, inter-institutional)

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EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A REFORM TOOL

General data on the reaccreditation process

(First year of evaluation - June 2016 to June 2017):

- 125 programmes were included in the plan - ASHE preparatory workshops (over 70)

- Early phase results made by HEIs themselves:
  - *37* programmes initiated substantial changes (classroom content, defence standards) or closed down (*10*)
  - Changes in the university management (formation of doctoral schools, regulations)

- 52 evaluations have been completed with 27 conditional decisions/trial periods and 25 positive recommendations (7 graded with high quality)

Criteria/recommendations for Doctoral programmes

- Decrease of admission quotas

- Recruitment of best research-oriented candidates

- Decrease of classroom content

- Increase and structure the research content

- Introduce transferable skills

- Internationalisation on all levels

- Improve quality of research behind dissertations

Criteria/recommendations for Mentorship

- Mentorship criteria based on research excellence, project and team leading skills and compatibility

- Develop structured, monitored and evaluated mentorship

- Training for mentors and appointment of co-mentorship

Criteria and aspects that were (not) implemented to lesser extent than planned:

- Engaging the university or school management in taking responsibility
- Engaging the private sector/industry/employers as stakeholders both in decision making and funding
- Implementation of recommendations that require any additional funding (awarding successful mentors, project holders, funds for internationalisation, etc.)

Challenges in the implementation of the procedure

- Foreigners in panels

- Dissertations in Croatian language

- Differences in doctoral traditions (duration, classroom content) and doctoral research throughout EU (depth of research)

- Difference in doctoral students status (and funding)

- *Problems with experts* in general HE QA (unequipped for this specific type of evaluation)

- Clustering programmes and balancing recommendations

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What do programme directors say?

- Issues:
    - Part of the criteria (resources) are not within programme's control
    - Costs of participating in the evaluation – creating the SAR, translating it to English, funding stakeholder participation in the site visits
    - Grading scale (improvements needed/high level of quality)
    - Management putting pressure on students and teachers

- Benefits:
    - Both the SAR preparation and the report were used to implement improvements

1. What are potential merits and drawbacks of using evaluations as policy interventions? Can they actually lead to improvements without additional funding and/or changes of the legal framework?

2. Issues of small research communities: how are they tackled by higher education institutions and agencies?

3. PhDs on the periphery – how to develop competitive PhD programmes with little internationalisation, state funding and few R&D positions in the economy?