

Prof. Marija Bušelić, Ph.D.

Sanja Blažević

Review of the Fifth Interchair Meeting of economic theories and similar chairs on social sciences faculties in the Republic of Croatia entitled „The Role of Theoretical Economy in the Education of Economists, Jurists and Politologists – Experiences and Proposals of Reform of the Bologna System of Higher Education”

The consideration of the role of theoretical economy in the education of economists, jurists and politologists in the context of changes in the higher education is necessary in order to pinpoint problems arising from an orthodox reflection on economy and the demands of the Bologna reform. With these facts in mind, the Chair of Economic Theory at the Faculty of Economics in Zagreb organized the 5th Interchair Meeting on 28 and 29 November 2011 entitled “The role of theoretical economy in the education of economists, jurists and politologists – experiences and proposals of reform of the Bologna system of higher education”. The meeting was organized through moderated conferences; five conferences were divided in two thematic groups entitled “Theoretical Economy and Its Role in the Education of Economists and Jurists in the Bologna System of Education” and “Theoretical Economy and Experiences of the Bologna Reform of Higher Education”. The conference saw the participation of 35 teachers from Croatia, 5 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and two teachers from Serbia.

The main goals of the conference were the consideration of connections and relations between theoretical economy and its disciplines or courses (political economy, economical methodology, history of economic thought, economic history, schools of economic thought, macroeconomics, microeconomics, international economy, foundation of economics, theory of economic policy, etc.) on one hand, and numerous business and applied courses on the other (accounting, marketing, management, managerial economics, business environment, tourism, trade, business finances, bank management, etc.). As the invitation to the meeting says, most of the attention is directed to experience in the teaching of theoretical disciplines from the start of the Bologna reform of higher education to the present day, as well as to the proposals of amendments of the Bologna system on social sciences faculties.

The first conference, which was oriented towards papers dealing with theoretical economy and current changes, was headed by Prof. Dragomir Sundać, PhD. The speakers, Prof. Đuro Medić, PhD, Ivo Eškinja Ec. S., Associate Prof. Slavica Manić, PhD, Prof. Rajko Odobaša, PhD, and others, all agreed on the need to point out the importance of theoretical economy in the perception of real economical and general cognitive problems. As Prof. Đuro Medić, PhD, says, theoretical economy has been put aside because of the “monopolization of knowledge by the neoclassical economics”. The common idea was that there is need for models and forecast based on heterodox theory and that the students’ attitudes should be shaped so as to get introduced with various notions through history in order to avoid, as Prof Rajko Odobaša, PhD, says, “moral nihilism”.

The second conference, headed by Prof. Đula Borozan, PhD, began with the presentation of a paper by a group of authors from the Rijeka Faculty of Economics, Prof Dragomir Sundać, PhD, Associate Prof. Dunja Škalamera and Mirela Ahmetović, M.Sc., on the motivations and expectations of students at the economics department. What was interesting was the conclusion that the intrinsic factors for the choice of studies were more accentuated among students of the “new generation” in 2011 compared to students from the year 1990, which points out a greater self-confidence of students, a fact often neglected and insufficiently emphasized when creating teaching programs and the teaching process in general. The other papers on this conference dealt with political economy issues and the reform of the education system, i.e. its role in the development of the system of modern economic education of economists as well as jurists. The authors, among which are Paula Letunić, M. Sc., Valentina Vučković, M.Sc., Prof. Marija Bušelić, PhD, Ass. Prof. Ivana Bajakić, PhD, showed the importance of political economy as scientific discipline and that of the postulates coming from its studying and development in the system of higher education as crucial for the understanding of the world from a wider perspective. According to Prof. Vojmir, Franičević, PhD, who participated to the conference, the neglect of political economy leads to a “deintellectualization of the study of economics” and the role of every scientist, teacher and political economist is “to be intellectually honest” and point out various achievements in economic thought and polit-economical relations through history.

The third conference, headed by Prof. Marija Bušelić, PhD, and Prof. Đuro Medić, PhD, concentrated on the changes arising from the implementation of the Bologna process (in the paper by Prof. Mirjana Dragičević, PhD, Prof. Lorena Škuflić, PhD and Velibor Mačkić, BA, and another paper by Prof. Lorena Škuflić, PhD, Mladen Turuk, Ec.S., and Petra Rkman, BSc. math), on a comparative analysis of economic and theoretical courses aided by concepts and criteria of the Croatian classification framework (paper by Ass. Prof. Aleksandra Krajnović, PhD, Dijana Čičin-Šain, B.Ec. and Ivina Mikulandra Volić, B.Ec.) while, with the aim of regional comparison, part of the papers dealt with the role of theoretical economy in the education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina (authors Prof. Đoko Slijepčević, PhD and Prof. Mladen Ivanić, PhD).

The fourth conference, headed by Prof. Đuro Medić, PhD, discussed the theories of international migrations and their role in the education of economists and jurists (Prof. Đula Borozan, PhD and Prof. Ivana Barković Bojanić, PhD) and, connected, the papers authored by Prof. Nihada Mujić, PhD and Martina Mirkut, and Prof. Jelena Legčević, PhD, and Prof. Rajko Odoša, PhD, dealt with the topic of students’ perception of international mobility and quality of lectures within theoretical subjects at the Faculty of Economics in Osijek. The results of the research of students’ perception of international mobility were very interesting as they showed that internal factors, such as the incomprehension of the system of acknowledgement of exams and acquired qualifications, were more important for students than external factors such as travel and accommodation costs, suggesting the need for better communication between students and those in charge of mobility between institutions, all with the aim of better student mobility. There was also discussion of new economics as science with the aim of developing a better system for the interpretation of real problems (authors Prof. Marinko Škare, PhD, Dean Sinković, PhD

and Romina Pržiklas Družeta, M.Sc.). The last paper of this conference was presented by Prof. Aleksandra Jovanović, PhD, from the Faculty of Law in Belgrade, on the development of economic analysis of law and its role in economic and legal education, proving that theoretical economy goes beyond the mere economic consideration of problems and relations.

The last, fifth conference, headed by Prof. Mirjana Dragičević, PhD, started with a paper by Edina Sudžuka, M.Sc., about the legal framework of the Bologna process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two papers dealt with teaching issues, in particular with the main points of discordance between expectations and satisfaction of the students with theoretical courses (authors Perica Vojnić, M.Sc. and Nebojša Stojčić, PhD) and the role of economic growth theories and international trade in the education of economists, authored by Nebojša Stojčić, PhD. The last paper by Prof. Mladen Vedriš, PhD, Prof. Uroš Dujšin, PhD and Ružica Simić, B.Sc, analyzed the role of the course "Economic Policy" in the education of jurists.

The fifth inter-chair meeting was closed by the president of the programme board Prof. Đuro Medić, PhD, thanking all the participants and the programme and organizational board for their activity which contributed to having joint meetings of economic theory chair members and similar chairs on faculties of economics and law, as well as faculties of political sciences for a number of years. Beside Prof. Đuro Medić, PhD, from the Faculty of Economics in Zagreb, the members of the programme board were Prof. Branko Blažević, PhD, from the Faculty of Tourist and Hotel Management in Opatija, University of Rijeka, Prof. Đula Borozan, PhD, from the Faculty of Economics of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek, Prof. Marija Bušelić, PhD, from the Department of Economics and Tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković" at the Juraj Dobrila University in Pula, Associate Prof. Aleksandra Krajnović, PhD, from the Department of Economics at the University of Zadar, Prof. Zlatan Reić from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Split, Nebojša Stojčić, PhD, from the Department of Economics at the University of Dubrovnik and Prof. Dragomir Sundać, PhD, from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Rijeka. The members of the organizational board were Prof. Lorena Škuflić, PhD, from the Faculty of Economics, University of Zagreb, as board president, Prof. Luka Brkić, PhD, from the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Zagreb, Prof. Marinko Škare, PhD, from the Department of Economics and Tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković" at the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Prof. Mladen Vedriš, PhD, from the Faculty of Law at the University of Zagreb, Prof. Nela Vlahinić – Dizdarević, PhD, from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Rijeka and Assist. Prof. Ilko Vrankić, PhD, from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Zagreb.

Summing up the analyses, experience and theses of the presented papers, Prof. Đuro Medić emphasized a few conclusions and proposals. First of all, the scientific contributions and discussion at the meeting show that faculties of economics and law (as well as other social sciences) need to harmonize the concepts and contents of the courses in economic theory on one hand and courses in applied economics on the other hand (especially in the area of public policies and business economics). Today there is a noticeable discordance in this area so that improvements are a long-term process and a task for the university professors. Secondly, there is a noticeable process of suppression of the complete theoretical (especially heterodox, i.e.



Keynesian, Marxist and institutionalist) economics at the faculties of economics in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, and a trend to turn faculties into professional business schools. This process was not arrested by the Bologna process, it only continued in the same direction. Thirdly, the Bologna reform in the field of theoretical economics has both positive and negative results. The positive ones can be seen in the standardization of the contents of single courses, exchanges of experiences, greater domestic and international student and professor mobility, etc. The negative results are seen in the suppression of theoretical economics at the expense of business economics. The reduction of extensive courses in theoretical economics (like Elements of Economics, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, History of Economic Thought, etc.) to one semester, with the teaching material staying basically the same, did not have any positive impact on the quality of lectures and the success of students. The students achieving better results in introductory and theoretical courses also have better results in specialist courses in business economics, economics and public policies. Fourth, there is need for reaffirmation of the complete (especially heterodox) theoretical economics and a coordination of contents and levels of teaching on single courses.

In the end, the participants of the meeting have accepted the idea that the Faculty of Economics in Zagreb publish the meeting proceedings showing papers presented at the meeting. Furthermore, the participants also accepted the proposal for the next (sixth) inter-chair meeting in 2013 to be organized by the Faculty of Economics and the Faculty of Law of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek.