

International Summer University Macedonia 2007

External evaluation report

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1.0 Introduction

As part of the external evaluation of the International Summer University Macedonia 2007 (ISUM 2007), we focused on the following four central questions

- What is ISUM trying to achieve?
- How are the organizers of ISUM working to achieve its goals?
- How do the organizers of ISUM know the project is working well?
- How should ISUM be changed in order to be improved?

Based on these four global questions, we have sub-divided this report into four main sections: (1)the mission and goals of the ISUM project; (2) The Organization and activities of ISUM 2007; (3) quality assurance issues; and (4) conclusions and recommendations for the future.

This report is based on our review of many documents relating to the ISUM project, and a site visit we conducted to ISUM 2007 during July. During that visit, we interviewed SPARK managers, visiting professors, co-professors, and students. One evaluator was supposed to return to Macedonia during the autumn of 2007 to observe a Bologna-related workshop, but that visit did not occur.

2.0 The Mission and goals of the ISUM project

The official aims and objectives of ISUM are stated in the summary of the project proposal SPARK submitted to the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Macedonia. The primary goal is the establishment of “a sustainable, high-quality Summer university serving as a platform for inter-university co-operation within Macedonia, while improving the quality of higher education in Macedonia and accelerating its integration into the European Higher Education Area, i.e. Bologna process.” A secondary goal articulated in the Terms of Reference for this evaluation is the “De-politicisation of higher education in Macedonia by fostering cooperation between ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian

academic institutions through the organization of a comprehensive joint Summer university program.“

As part of the “de-politicisation” of higher education in Macedonia, SPARK was advancing what we will refer to as a “semi-official” objective, namely the establishment of an atmosphere of trust among students from Macedonia’s main ethnic communities, so that ISUM could be a place where prejudices would be questioned, where the process of reconciliation would be encouraged, and where ethnic divisions would be decreased. This semi-official agenda was not explicitly communicated to potential students, visiting professors, and co-professors. However, these semi-official objectives became evident in our interviews with the organizers of ISUM and in discussions with student participants.

Our interviews with a variety of ISUM project constituencies revealed the following:

- For the university leaders and partially for participating local academic staff, the implementation of the Bologna process is the most frequently cited reason for their participation in ISUM and their cooperation with members of other ethnic communities. Simultaneously, the university leaders were also motivated to participate in ISUM because of the foreign funding and the opportunity to interact with foreign organizers. The university leaders cited as the highest priority ISUM’s first strategic goal, i.e., cooperation in Bologna implementation, and viewed the second strategic goal and the semi-official objectives of ISUM to be positive but not warranting special attention.
- The co-professors were focused on the immediate needs of their particular academic departments and their subject matter. They were eager to implement Bologna action lines but were skeptical about their overall implementation at their home universities. They understood that the implementation of the Bologna action lines is a key goal of ISUM, but felt that the semi-official goals about ethnic relations were not as relevant to them in the context of ISUM. They were more concerned with developing their course together with international visiting professors. The co-professors, however, were well aware of the semi-official objectives of ISUM, as they taught students of different ethnic backgrounds and observed the ethnic divisions at the micro level.
- While fully aware of all ISUM objectives, Spark’s organizers of ISUM chose not to stress the semi-official goals of ISUM. They believed that an openly

articulated emphasis on the inter-ethnic issues and related goals of ISUM would have been counterproductive.

- Based on the interviews with randomly selected students, we learned that most of the students were well aware of the semi-official objectives of ISUM, and they were usually very eager to reflect on their experiences and observations concerning contact with members of other ethnic groups and on their own prejudices about certain groups. We observed two main types of opinions: (1) students who came to ISUM primarily because of academic reasons, such as to attend a course not available at their faculties, to experience new teaching methods, or to receive credits from ISUM; and (2) students who primarily stressed social reasons for attending ISUM, including the opportunity to meet new friends, to interact with different people, and to deal with prejudices.

The differing perceptions among ISUM's various constituencies regarding ISUM's mission and goals demonstrate that ISUM's strategic goals as articulated in official documents should not be viewed as a static picture, but as a dynamic discourse, defined and changed depending on the different participants in the project. This report will take this natural fuzziness inherent in the relationship between goals and outcomes into account as much as possible.

3.0 The Organization and activities of ISUM 2007

In this section we assess the organization and activities of ISUM and address the inevitable discrepancy between what ought to be (values and goals) and what actually occurs (organization and activities). We reflect on the question of How do the organizers of ISUM go about achieving their declared goals? We bring forth the strengths and weaknesses in each of the activities. This assessment takes the following issues into account:

- Governance and management of the ISUM project
- ISUM courses and their compatibility with the Bologna process
- The Bologna elements in ISUM 2007
- The quality of the teaching facilities

- The quality of student accommodations and food served in the student dormitories
- The public forums
- The Bologna workshops/training
- The quality of ISUM promotional documents

3.1 Governance and management of the ISUM project

ISUM 2007 marked the beginning of a transition in the overall management of the project. As with SPARK's other summer universities, ISUM is slated to revert to local financing and greater control of the Macedonian partner institutions. All significant management changes involve understandable stresses and challenges that affect the overall functioning of the project. Responsibilities for the day-to-day management of the project were coordinated between SPARK senior staff from the Netherlands, and local Macedonian staff from the SPARK Skopje office. A full-time representative of SPARK-Amsterdam had recently joined the project and was on site continuously monitoring the success of ISUM. An additional SPARK intern and SPARK financial officer were also on hand to assist the local staff during the period of ISUM 2007. The ISUM Coordinating Committee played a central role in organizing the courses and in recruiting local co-professors. The Inter-University Committee seemed to play a minimal role in the implementation of ISUM, although it is envisioned that ownership of the ISUM project will be gradually transferred to some kind of inter-university committee.

During our visit to ISUM, we regularly attended the daily staff meetings chaired by the Dutch ISUM project coordinator. These meetings were conducted in a constructive atmosphere and many of the immediate problems or concerns were addressed effectively. Occasionally, certain matters seemed to be coordinated too hastily, such as the visit of ISUM students to Pristina and Mitrovica, and on other occasions it seemed that certain clarifications from the central SPARK office in Amsterdam were not being received in a timely fashion. For the local Macedonian staff, ISUM 2007 constituted the fourth program of study they had organized together, as nearly all the local staff have remained with SPARK since the first winter university in 2005. Given their experience, the local staff members seemed at ease with the logistical issues of ISUM 2007 and carried out their work efficiently. However, we recommend that improvements be made

in customer service, especially when making available reimbursements to the students, providing them with their keys, and in other logistical matters. We observed long lines for reimbursements, and suggest that additional tables be set up so as to allow for more efficient processing of paperwork and requests.

The local Macedonian staff of SPARK is ethnically diverse and a model of positive interethnic relations. The logistics officers they engaged during ISUM were also of diverse ethnic backgrounds. We detected some anxiety among the local staff regarding the uncertainties surrounding the sustainability of ISUM in the future, and these fears were not properly addressed by SPARK senior staff, who placed heavy responsibilities on their newly-hired project manager; it was unfair and unrealistic to expect someone so new to ISUM to manage the project without more visible and active support from Amsterdam.

In the future it would be helpful for the overall success of ISUM for one of the project coordinators to be from the academic community. This ramping up of academic credentials would greatly enhance the prestige of the project and allow for better relations between SPARK and the participating faculties and universities. This person could be called an Academic Director or Dean of ISUM, and would be responsible for developing a coherent academic curriculum for ISUM and the guarantee of quality instruction and effective teaching methods. It is such a person who would appropriately conduct midterm evaluations of the courses as they would have the credibility to make concrete pedagogical suggestions and constructive criticisms of the syllabi, learning outcomes, assessment tools, and course content.

3.2 ISUM courses and their compatibility with the Bologna process

In this section we discuss two key aspects relating to the courses offered at ISUM. The first is regarding the variety of subject areas, the method for choosing ISUM courses, and the need to increase the number of interdisciplinary courses. The second is an assessment of the success of the integration of Bologna elements in the ISUM courses.

3.2.1 ISUM 2007 courses: variety and content

As in previous years, the courses offered at ISUM were determined by the participating Macedonian faculties, and mostly were in the areas of business/economics, education, law, and public administration and policy. The two courses that were radically outside these main thematic areas were course 7 (Environment and Science), course 12 (Creative Writing), and course 17 on gender, ethnicity and democracy. We recommend that ISUM develop signature courses to be known throughout the region for their high quality and innovative teaching methods, and that these courses be attractive interdisciplinary courses that include new thematic areas, such as the natural sciences, cultural studies, the social sciences, and the humanities. This type of curriculum would be best developed by a new academic dean of ISUM, whose primary responsibility would be the implementation of a coherent and exciting new curriculum with courses that may lie outside the „comfort zone“ of the participating faculties. This academic dean would wrest control of curricular issues away from the coordinating committee, which would revert to being an advisory board for the dean. The ISUM dean would be given the authority to negotiate with faculty deans and vice-deans on the nature of the ISUM curriculum, the transferrability of the courses and credits to local faculties, and the quality of the co-professor teaching staff. The ISUM dean would also have the authority to accept course proposals from potential visiting professors and present these proposals to the participating faculties. With these measures, greater creativity and interest can be built into the ISUM curriculum, and the ISUM courses would become widely known for the high quality of the courses, teaching staff, and learning outcomes.

3.2.2 The Bologna process at Macedonian universities and SPARK's role

One of ISUM's proclaimed objectives was to set a best practice example concerning implementation of the Bologna process action lines for institutions of higher education in Macedonia. In our interview with the manager of the ISUM project we learned that “everything we do here at ISUM, from credits calculation, formulation of learning outcomes, format of the evaluation questionnaire is an example for the local academic staff and students that the practical Bologna implementation is possible... we want to show them how it can be done . . . [with] concrete examples...that is why I work . . . [in such] detail . . . about course formalities with the teaching staff at ISUM”. This

statement reveals the high priority placed on the Bologna-related issues in the ISUM project. One of the central action lines of the Bologna process is the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System and related reforms of the curriculum based on an approach stressing learning outcomes. Given the urgency of reforms in Macedonian higher education, the ISUM leadership was wise to make the Bologna process a top priority. Equally wise was the decision not to work directly on the implementation of the Bologna process in Macedonia, which is primarily the task of the ministry and other universities, but to take a role of the “inspirer” organizing a playground for implementation of the Bologna process instruments, and offering best practice examples and trying to transfer them into the other universities in the country. Clearly, SPARK is not fully responsible for the outcome of these activities since the overall success of Bologna implementation depends on the involvement of other cooperating parties and the level of their commitment to making substantial changes in their respective areas of responsibility.

The biggest challenge facing the Macedonian higher education system today is that the University curricula are weakened because there is a significant gap between processes of teaching and learning; this gap exists because of the propensity for non-interactive teaching methods prevalent in Macedonian universities. Based on the interviews with students at ISUM) The gap appears to be wider when taking into consideration the high degree of fragmentation at the institutional level. This fragmentation is inherited from the Yugoslav university system which was characterised by widely differing academic practices across universities and faculties, and varying levels of funding across academic units. In this system, the faculties were the separate legal entities within the university. SPARK’s advancing of the Bologna Process is made much more difficult because of this institutional fragmentation and the lack of well-delineated responsibilities at the institutional level in the four universities in Macedonia. SPARK’s most prominent partners for coordinating the Bologna Process are the University rectors, but their participation is no guarantee of full institutional participation. For the Bologna Process to succeed, SPARK must engage the middle-management level University administrators, including deans, Vice-Deans, chairs, and heads of departments. The Active participation from these administrators is crucial to ensure the kinds of changes inherent in the Bologna process. We recommend that SPARK

concentrate on reaching these people and include them more actively in ISUM activities.

SPARK has also targeted individual professors and administrators from different universities and their subunits as individuals who can advance the Bologna process in Macedonia. These individuals—many of whom have been ISUM co-professors-- have been involved and motivated; they have undertaken the task of preparing course syllabi to conform to Bologna process requirements. This group consists mostly of younger academic staff, which has also been involved in the project as participants in the various Bologna-related workshops/trainings organized by SPARK. Through our interviews with these individuals, we learned that while they are reform-oriented and eager to implement changes, they felt challenged and discouraged because of the resistance and passivity they encountered among colleagues—often older full professors-- in their home departments. Given their frustration, these ISUM co-professors sought to change matters only within their own narrow domains, such as the course they teach or part of the program they are involved in. They praised the interactive teaching experience at ISUM and were positive about the knowledge they gained about the implementation of the Bologna process but they were skeptical about the transfer of these practices into their usual academic environment. Some assistant professors were keen to act as change agents in their faculties and departments; SPARK should encourage these individuals more in future activities. Some co-professors suggested that more targeted programme/faculty based workshops should be organized. They suggested that these workshops would have the goal of exposing Macedonian academic staff to concrete practices and experiences from ISUM to. They indicated that the local staff is usually not well informed about technical elements of the Bologna process or are generally resistant to change. We believe that SPARK should pursue this idea in the future.

To sum up, SPARK's task in connection with the Bologna process in Macedonia implementation has shifted from the role of "inspirer" to the provider of relevant information and the implementor of best practices.

3.3 ISUM 2007 and its Bologna elements

ISUM 2007 included a variety of Bologna-oriented aspects. For instance, the course syllabi were designed according to unofficial Bologna norms. These syllabi included features such as the expressions of learning outcomes, calculations of student working hours, credits, course levels, expectations from students, and others. In addition, the interactive teaching methods, designed to stimulate critical thinking, were meant to be an integral part of the student experience at ISUM. The next Bologna element was the notion of the transferability of the achieved credits and grades at ISUM to the home university. Finally, SPARK instituted an internal quality assurance system vis-a-vis the teaching staff, and used well-formulated questionnaires to conduct evaluations of students. SPARK strove to promote through ISUM a core value of the Bologna process – student mobility.

3.3.1 Implementation of ECTS and learning outcomes – syllabi

SPARK has embraced the character of the Bologna discourse by giving a central role to learning outcomes and credits in the ISUM courses.

The ISUM 2007 course syllabi were written in a transparent and innovative format. They included an estimation of the average student workload for each of the activities in the course, in accordance with the principles supported by ECTS. Teachers had also a chance to adjust the estimation of the student workload and subsequently the number of credits during the midterm evaluation conducted by a member of SPARK's team. This new practice was beneficial for the quality of the syllabi and it should be continued in future ISUM editions. The questions concerning the amount of time spent engaging in different learning activities were included in the student evaluation questionnaire and the data about real student workload were collected at the end of ISUM. This practice is a crucial element of the implementation of ECTS, and represents a best practice example. This kind of information is useful in making adjustments in the methods and contents of a course, or adjustment of the number of credits allocated to the individual course. Both adjustments are necessary in case the course is repeated. Such information can also be very useful if some of the courses are being repeated during upcoming summer

universities or would be partially applicable whenever the course from ISUM may also be a regular course co-professors from Macedonia teach at the Macedonian universities. We believe that the practice of calculating student workload and allocation of credits to the individual courses is transferrable to the participating Macedonian universities. However, unfortunately in most cases the co-professors are not in a position to use the ISUM-inspired syllabi in their regular courses at their home institutions, since most co-professors, i.e., those without PhD degrees, are not given the opportunity to write course syllabi or conduct courses independently. These co-professors can merely pass the syllabi on to their more senior colleagues, and they can use the seminar material to teach, and they can advise their faculty on how to create such syllabi. We were concerned that the co-professors expressed skepticism about the prospects for the transferrability of such practices to their home faculties. Some of them, mostly from SEE University in Tetovo, already have had some experience with ECTS and they believed that current practices at their home institution can be improved based on the model from ISUM. Other co-professors coming from other universities mostly found ISUM practices concerning credit allocation as “idealistic” and not really applicable at their home institutions. They reported that their home institutions boast obsolete structures, and that such a substantial change would be too complicated. However, they recognised that the SPARK model is a “correct” one for how to implement ECTS. We noted, however, that most of the co-professors understood the calculation of student workload and writing of the learning outcomes as a mere formality they were required to perform to make the syllabi formats conform. For them, the more important aspects were to focus on course content issues, the cooperation with the visiting professors, and the possibility of establishing new contacts needed to advance their research.

SPARK should continue to shift attention from the input / content issues to the output-type issues (typical student workload, learning outcomes, and student learning experiences). It would be much easier to work with co-professors on these issues if they would be required/pressed to present their syllabi proposals much earlier than it was the case for ISUM 2007. In such a scenario someone from the SPARK team would have the chance to revise the syllabi and work together with the co-professors on improvements and on allowing for proper understandings of the importance of the “formalities,” such as credits and learning outcomes.

The definition of the learning outcomes within the syllabi was required from the teaching staff for the first time for ISUM 2007. That task was done far less successfully than the task of estimating the typical student workload and allocating of credits. In this respect, syllabi differed markedly, and the learning outcomes were the domain where the experience of the visiting professors greatly determined the formal quality of the defined learning outcome statements. Usually the learning outcomes in the courses of the professors coming from the educational field and from Anglo-Saxon educational systems were far better formulated as a consequence of their long experience with learning outcomes in everyday educational practice (e.g., the course about Education and Communication led by prof. Prince). Interviews with the professors revealed a lack of knowledge concerning the use and formulation of learning outcomes. Co-professors from Macedonia admitted that they attended the training organised by SPARK about syllabus writing which also included the parts about learning outcomes, but more effort should be put in the training of co-professors in this direction.

However, the biggest deficit of the syllabi analysed was the lack of descriptions of the planned assessment of the learning outcomes and a model of the assessment and grading criteria for the listed learning outcomes and courses. The format of the syllabus required the listing of the assignments which would be given to students, but there were hardly any descriptions of the methods teachers plan to use in the assessment of the student assignments. Interviews with the professors showed that the method of assessment used was usually very subjective and based on non-written criteria. These assessments were mostly based on the general impression a professor received from the student work and quality of the concrete assignment. It is crucial that events like ISUM showcase a different approach to the issues of learning outcomes and assessment. Properly written learning outcomes make no sense if they are not assessable and if there is no detailed description of the ways of how the professor plans to assess student achievement of these outcomes. In addition, any proper description of assessment must be followed by a clear definition of the assessment and marking criteria which would be presented in advance to students.

When considering the part of the ISUM course syllabi which formally define learning outcomes and the lack of parts describing assessment of defined learning outcomes, we concluded that the syllabi did not offer an example of best practices transferrable to the participating Macedonian universities. However, these deficits can be easily addressed, and do not affect the generally positive impression about the degree of

correspondence between the ISUM syllabi and the requirements of the Bologna process, and about their innovative character in the Macedonian higher education context.

The recommendation for the future summer universities is that the transparency of learning outcomes and assessment issues must be at the centre of the requirements set for syllabi by SPARK and ISUM in order to set a truly transferable model of course curricula to the other universities in the country. We recommend the organisation of an additional training program for co-professors and other interested instructors from Macedonia focusing on learning outcomes and their link to assessment, and on defining usable and transparent assessment criteria. This training should include individual counselling for co-professors conducted by an expert when the syllabus is being design. It would also be advisable for SPARK to publish a small step-by-step booklet/guide to university staff about the use of learning outcomes and assessment criteria in order to make innovations in the courses of study.

3.3.2 Teaching methods

The teaching methods at ISUM were supposed to offer a different experience for the participating students compared with the usual teaching methods they face during their studies at the universities in the region. The original idea to have classes of a maximum of 20 students was not put into practice and students frequently changed from course to course during the first week of ISUM, making some courses much larger (up to 30 participants) and some of them relatively small (between 12 and 15 participants). The limiting of the number of students in the classes is central for the success of the desired interactive teaching methods and the reduction of lecture-style teaching. The changing number of students in the classes made the work of instructors difficult because they could not plan in advance the tasks and they had to spend additional time for repeating the content to the newcomers. The organisers should try to limit the number of the participants per course and discourage transfer between courses in the very late stages of the programme. It would also be wise to make the first day of the ISUM programme an introductory period where the courses would be presented to the students in shifts, so that the undecided students get the opportunity to listen to several course introductions with the aim of selecting their desired course. Some of the students, especially the ones from the SEE region, told us that they were placed in courses which they had not listed even as their third choices, and as a result they were less motivated

to study and became frustrated. This practice must be avoided in the future, and the students' list of three preferences should be respected whenever possible. The individual from SPARK responsible for placement of students into courses confirmed that in some cases the list of preferences was not respected at all because of the need to maintain classes with ethnically-mixed groups and students from different countries and universities. In some cases this criterion was primary in deciding placements. This practice should not be repeated; the educational criteria and preferences of individuals should be the primary factor, and the need for diversity in the classroom should be secondary. The creation of a diverse study environment is very important but diversity can be achieved by other means, such as the extra-curricular and recreational activities.

According to the syllabi analysed, the teaching methods used were diverse and oriented towards activating the role of students in the learning/teaching process. The methods included classical lecturing, work on cases in small groups, workshops, simulations, and the inclusion of information technology in the process of learning and teaching (courses 13 and 15). Given the state of teaching methods in the region, we concluded that the methodology of teaching used at ISUM 2007 was refreshing. This conclusion is largely confirmed through interviews with the students, when they were asked to compare the methods used at ISUM and the methods they experience at their home institutions. However, students sometimes complained about the heavy workload, the facilities, and in some cases the professors who were not clear in their lectures or instructions. Some of the professors interviewed complained about the lack of proficiency in English among individual students, and the difficulties in involving these students in the course activities. These students were not identified as a group and only individual cases were cited, and most of them were from Macedonia and should have been tested in English as part of the application procedure. The English proficiency testing needs to be organised in a stricter environment, and attention should also be paid to the English proficiency of the Macedonian co-professors.

We felt that ISUM provided a student-centred environment. The teaching methods in most of the cases supported this concept. The student evaluations and interviews with students further supported this claim. Students felt positively about being encouraged to participate in the course activities (for all courses 3,97 out of 5). The same positive feedback was seen in the perception of freedom to speak freely in the classroom and to give an opinion (4.46 out of 5), in the quality of interaction between students and

teachers (4.38 out of 5), in the balance between theory and practice (4.11 out of 5) and a balanced mix of different teaching methods (4.18 out of 5). The impression of students was, however, that the student workload was slightly higher than they expected (average grade 3,09), but it is unclear whether the reason for this had to do with under expectations of students or over-expectations of professors. In the future, a comparison should be made between the estimated workload and the answers students gave about the time spent on different learning activities for the course in the evaluation questionnaire (average values should be calculated and compared with syllabi) . This kind of analysis should be done by SPARK for ISUM 2007 and presented to teachers at future summer universities in order to help estimate student workloads in the courses and the allocation of credits.

The above statements about student opinions are based on the average for all students and courses; An analysis of each course would involve too many details. However, SPARK should provide an overview of some of the key questions according to course and especially for the courses with overall ratings lower than the other courses, e.g., course number 2 (Contemporary marketing research) course number 8 (Contemporary forms of organised crime), and course number 16 (Speech communication and education).

In closing, we note that the multicultural student population and overall educational setting represented additional methodological challenges in the context of ISUM. The students positively evaluated the overall influence of ISUM on their understanding of other cultures (4.2 out of 5), but it is not possible to distinguish how much the time spent in the intercultural classroom contributed to that perception. It would be wise to include this question in the future evaluation questionnaires. We were surprised when we discovered in the interviews with visiting professors and co-professors that they felt little need to adapt their teaching methodologies to facilitate better intercultural and inter-ethnic communication. This impression was corroborated in the answers professors and co-professors provided regarding the special teaching adaptations designed to facilitate intercultural/ethnic understanding and their answers on whether they noticed that particular groups of students tended to be segregated in the classroom (e.g., always creating a small working group with the people of the same background). As foreigners, the Visiting professors said that they were unable to distinguish the ethnic backgrounds of students based on the students' names. However, the co-professors did not admit to

being aware of the need to adapt their methods or content (e.g., giving the examples from the region when possible) to facilitate intercultural learning, but they nonetheless seem to understand the potentials of such adaptation of methodology. This aspect is an important field for future SPARK activities and for future editions of SPARK's summer universities. The adaptation of teaching contents and methods based on intercultural and interethnic considerations should be reinforced in the process of preparing teaching staff for the work at ISUM. Adhering to a policy of "neutrality" of contents and methods in this respect does not bring added value to the learning about other people, their cultures and ways or reasoning.

3.3.3 Transfer of credits

For SPARK, the acceptance of credits accumulated at ISUM by the home institutions has always been a crucial Bologna process-related goal. However, this task has been difficult to achieve and it has not been particularly successful, but SPARK cannot be held responsible for the non-recognition of the ISUM courses at the regular universities in Macedonia. The lack of recognition of the credits is due mostly to formal barriers present at the state universities in Macedonia, which usually have little or no experience with this practice.

Compared to the situation described in the 2006 ISUM external evaluation report, we detected that some progress has been made on the issue of credit recognition. The non-recognition of credits resulted from a lack of trust in the value of the ISUM courses; however, the ISUM 2007 courses seem to be viewed by officials at the Macedonian universities as high-quality courses worthy of serious consideration for credit transfer. The main obstacle, however, continues to be the misconception at Macedonian universities that recognition is possible only in cases of courses constituting "exact equivalence" to courses offered in regular University programs. Thus, the ISUM courses are assessed only for absolute equivalence in the title of the course, contents, and examination methods. The students interviewed fully supported the concept of credit recognition, but were skeptical about the practicalities of receiving transfer credits. Some of them said that they were guaranteed credit transfer in advance by their professors, but it turned out that these same professors were simultaneously the co-professors at ISUM and that the course in question had identical content to that in the programme of

study at the home institution. Such a guarantee implied that the students in question were free of the obligation to attend the same course in a future term at their home universities. Some returning ISUM students stressed that they had registered for ISUM so that they could take courses not usually taught at their home universities, and these students more highly valued the experience of learning subjects and materials not available at their home institutions. Still other students were at ISUM primarily because of the possibility to get credits transferred so that they would have to take fewer courses in the subsequent academic years.

In conclusion, the transferrability of credits still greatly depends on the initiative and persistence of the individual students. This situation is contrary to the *Lisbon Declaration on Recognition of Degrees and Periods of Study in Europe*-- an integral part of the instruments of the Bologna process--since in this case, the students usually bear the burden of proof in the procedure of recognition of the ISUM courses. The lack of institutional backing for the recognition of ISUM credits is problematic and unsatisfactory. We recommend that the four Macedonian university co-sponsors of ISUM sign a binding legal agreement with SPARK guaranteeing recognition of the credits and courses of ISUM or at the very least the agreement would specify which courses would be recognized as applying to their respective study programmes.

3.4 Teaching facilities

ISUM 2007 was held at the Technical Faculty of the St. Kliment Ohridski University in Bitola. The quality of the facilities was satisfactory. The classrooms included tables that were easily moved which allowed for the conducting of classes in a setting resembling that of a workshop. Some students and professors complained that they did not have ample computer and internet access, but such access could not be provided due to the constraints of the infrastructure at the faculty. The two rooms with computers were reserved for courses 13 and 15 in which the topics of the courses included use of information technology in teaching. The professors of these courses were the most vocal in their complaints about the teaching facilities. They complained about the layout of the room which did not allow for the placing of additional chairs in a way that two students could work at the same computer as had been planned. The computer rooms were very small and hot—both due to the heat generated by the computer stations and the very

high temperatures during the day. These same professors also complained that some of the needed software was missing. We recommend that SPARK staff and some of the co-professors using information technology in their courses visit the computer facilities in advance, so that they can check up the available software and better prepare for the teaching at ISUM with their visiting professors. In addition, we suggest that at least some internet-capable computers be made available to students.

3.5 Accommodation and food

Students complained most strongly about the accommodations, especially the sanitary conditions and the quality of the meals. Students were accommodated in two different dormitories; one was next to the faculty where the ISUM courses were organized, and the other dormitory was almost a half-hour walk away from the faculty. Students from this second dormitory complained that they felt discriminated against because they would sometimes have to pay out of pocket for taxis in order to get to the main facilities. With the high temperatures in the second week of ISUM, The sanitary conditions became even worse. In some cases the facilities were not properly cleaned by the cleaning personnel employed in the dormitories. We recommend that SPARK hire additional cleaning personnel in the future.

SPARK's plan to mix students from different countries and ethnic backgrounds in the same rooms failed, because there were no plans made in advance for the assignment of participants to specific rooms. The assignment of student rooms was conducted on a "first come, first serve " basis. This policy had the result that many students were assigned to rooms with friends and people they knew from before, or that one of the dormitories had an entire floor consisting only of ethnic Albanian students. This practice is contrary to ISUM's goals, does not enrich the ISUM experience, and must be avoided in future ISUM editions. SPARK staff must set in advance a room plan guaranteeing that the participations will be housed in rooms and floors that are ethnically diverse. In addition, the welcome and registration desk needs to be better organized and staffed so that initial frustration and waiting for hours after arrival for the name tags and accommodation assignments would not recur. We detected that the highest degree of student dissatisfaction had to do with the quality of the food provided in the student cafeteria, which lacking diversity and included very few vegetables and fruits. We

recommend that SPARK invest in some additional nutritious snacks for students, such as fruit.

The issue of accommodation and food can potentially interfere greatly with the overall impact of the ISUM experience. It could prove to be an obstacle preventing students from advancing properly academically--issues such as non-appetising food or improperly functioning or excessively dirty showers can result in lower student motivation and a much lower overall satisfaction rate with the ISUM experience. , We suggest that the number of participants be decreased so that SPARK can spend more on higher quality food during ISUM and more adequate accommodations. SPARK should undertake a detailed cost-benefit analysis of such a solution.

3.6 Public forums

During ISUM 2007, four public forums were held. SPARK greatly improved the format of these forums in comparison to previous years. The forums were mostly moderated by ISUM visiting professors and/or co-professors, and the topics aroused great interest among the student in attendance. The only glitch detected was that the microphones failed in the 17 July debate ("Equality and non-discrimination of sexual minorities"). Nevertheless, the debate included spirited exchanges and the students seemed genuinely engaged, even continuing the debate outside the main hall.

We recommend that these public forums be continued in the future, and more efforts be made to allow for more participation from the audience. Perhaps in the future, the audience can be divided into small discussion groups around tables, and at a certain point in the debate each small group of students would discuss a given issue and present their thoughts to the entire group.

3.7 Bologna workshops / trainings

SPARK conducted 4 Bologna process- related workshops in 2007, although 5 had originally been planned. Unfortunately, we were not able to attend any of the workshops and this part of the evaluation is based on the analysis of the documents provided by SPARK and an interview with one of the foreign experts who served as a trainer at one of the workshops.

The topics covered in the Bologna workshops related to the most important action lines of the Bologna process, including syllabus design, ECTS, credits recognition and quality assurance. The relevance of these topics for the Macedonian higher education context is clear and the idea to organise these workshops in a more interactive training mode is a very good strategy. The workshops organised before the main ISUM event in July had an explicit preparatory function for the co-professors at ISUM. The topics of this workshop, course design and ECTS, were somewhat redundant, and not well connected with one another. According to a SPARK manager, the post-ISUM workshops were oriented more towards the transfer of the ISUM experience and know-how to the Macedonian higher education context. The planned topics for this second group of workshops were the diploma supplement, evaluation and recognition of credits. We notice that mostly the same participants attend all workshops and most of these participants are also the co-professors at ISUM. It appears that there is no big outreach of this ISUM activity outside of a small circle of people usually attending such kind of workshops. Some co-professors told us that they were obliged to participate in the workshops and that most of the issues were already known to them. However, they showed a lack of understanding for some issues, such as learning outcomes. When reviewing the outlines of these workshops, we noted that the topics were covered in too general a manner without going deeply into developing concrete ideas and suggestions related to particular study programmes and institutions in Macedonia. The present stage of the Bologna process implementation in Macedonia requires more specialized workshops, which build upon each other. We feel that these workshops should be refocused to provide an in-depth knowledge about implementation of the Bologna action lines displaying concrete examples and a focus on the reform of specific courses and programmes. The co-professor participants interviewed suggested that an increased involvement of local individuals as trainers would be beneficial, and some of them offered to assist in coordination with SPARK and foreign experts with the organization of similar workshops at their faculties for their colleagues. SPARK should rethink the concept of the Bologna workshops in future editions. SPARK should take advantage of the knowledge, contacts and experience of the trained co-professors who could also serve as co-trainers for future workshops. The number of workshops should be increased but should be smaller and organised at specific faculties for local academic staff and student representatives. The workshops should target groups of professors and

administrators usually not participating in Bologna process related seminars and events. SPARK should consider allowing the use of local languages in some parts of the workshops in order to reach out to a broader constituency. The content of the workshops should focus on curriculum reform of specific study programmes and the transfer of the experience from ISUM to regular study programs at Macedonian universities. Broad concepts of curriculum reform should be intermingled with choices of specific facets of reform, such as learning outcomes, key competencies for the programme, credits, teaching methods, assessment, and evaluation. Efforts should be made to allow for more concrete outcomes of the workshops, oriented to the achievement of smaller reachable goals which can be evaluated in a more precise manner. In addition, one longer workshop / training lasting 2 or 3 days should be organized for future ISUM co-professors with the sole purpose of preparing them for ISUM. This longer training session would provide an opportunity for co-professors to plan their syllabi, write learning outcomes, develop assessment methods and grading criteria, improve their teaching methods, and prepare them for the intercultural learning orientation of ISUM. It would be best to organize such a preparatory workshop after the professors and co-professors submit their initial syllabi proposals. This timing would allow trainers at the workshop not only to make concrete suggestions for improvement, but would also facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices among co-professors.

3.8 ISUM documents and publications

This section analyses the materials prepared by ISUM for the participants and all other documents SPARK sent to the external evaluators during the work on the report.

3.8.1 ISUM Promotional materials

SPARK published ISUM 2007 posters and some flyers which were distributed to all local higher education institutions in Macedonia and to some institutions in the SEE region. The student evaluations reveal that students found out about ISUM most often from friends, and less frequently from information provided through printed materials at the student unions. We suggest that the publishing of posters and flyers be continued in

future editions. The visual design of these materials can be improved; too much text on the posters should be avoided.

3.8.2 SPARK website

Student evaluations reveal that a significant number of students found out about ISUM through the SPARK website and over emails. The importance of such means of communication are likely to increase in the future. ISUM and other summer universities organised by SPARK are not highlighted extensively on the SPARK website, as they are treated on equal footing with all other SPARK activities. The website concerning ISUM was insufficient; it mainly provided limited information materials for download, reports from previous events, and a list of offered courses. We suggest that a separate ISUM website should be created. All information should be presented in the user-friendly way on the website in the form of short articles and not only be available for download in pdf format. We further recommend that all materials, such as handouts, course syllabi, and Bologna workshop information be made available for the broader public on the website in the form of a small electronic library which would also include electronic materials related to the Bologna process and the reform of higher education in Macedonia and the region. These materials should be sorted by topic and not by the event where they were presented or used.

3.8.3 Student evaluation reports

SPARK provided an analysis of the student evaluations from ISUM. This document offers a good summary of the student evaluations. However there is still room for improvement. A more detailed analysis should be provided for each of the courses offered especially for the ones that were deemed to be better or worse than average. The results should also be analysed taking into consideration additional variables, such as gender, home university, and country of origin. Such an analysis would provide insight into potential differences in perception of ISUM experiences depending on the background of the participants.

3.8.4 Interim reports from workshops

These documents are very short and not very informative. They seem to be written only to fulfil formal requirements. The other materials from the workshops, such as handouts, and the list of participants provided for a better understanding of the form, content and overall impact of these events. We recommend that in place of the formal interim reports, SPARK should develop an evaluation questionnaire to be filled out by the participants and trainers at the end of the workshops. The results of these evaluations should be analysed and presented in a narrative/descriptive form. This questionnaire should be focused on discovering how the workshops would impact future activities of the participants in their home universities.

4.0 Quality Assurance Issues

In this section we address the question How do the organizers of ISUM know the project is working well? We focused our analysis on two main aspects of quality assurance within SPARK. We discuss the specific internal quality assurance mechanisms employed during ISUM and then we analyse the extent to which previous external evaluation recommendations were respected.

4.1 Internal quality assurance mechanisms

As mentioned above, During ISUM 2007 we observed that the ISUM team is well coordinated and clear about the division of tasks. The daily staff meetings were instrumental in identifying problems and in making improvements and correcting problems that arose. The staff were responsive to suggestions made at the meetings and to suggestions made from the ISUM participants. For instance, one professor suggested that some fans be bought in order to fight the excessive July heat affecting the classrooms; this suggestion efficiently turned into practice,. This kind of team coordination should be continued for the next editions. We also noted that the midterm evaluations conducted by senior SPARK managers of the syllabi, courses, and professors during ISUM is also a good practice and should be continued in the coming years.

The student evaluations represent a crucial quality assurance instrument. The evaluation questionnaire is a best practice example which can serve as a reference for other universities in Macedonia, especially in terms of how the questionnaires are analysed and electronically processed. Some additional questions should be added, e.g. questions about the impact of the courses and their content and methods for the purposes of interethnic and intercultural understanding. In the present questionnaire students comment only on the overall impact of ISUM as related to these issues. SPARK should also discuss results of the evaluations individually with co-professors in Macedonia for each course separately and try to point out the issues which can be improved in terms of the syllabus or methods. The calculation of the average student workload for each course and course activity must be provided based on the answers from the student evaluations. These results must be compared with the estimations given by instructional staff. These results should be taken into account for future editions of ISUM and for the future estimations of the student workload for courses.

4.2 Implementation of previous recommendations from external evaluations

Many of the previous recommendations for improving ISUM were implemented in ISUM 2007. The period of the summer university was shortened, and this shorter session seemed to work better. The overall number of students was slightly reduced by approximately 50 students, but should be reduced even more. The biggest improvements were in the designations of course levels, learning outcomes, and credit acceptance commitments from Macedonian faculties. The recommendations that were still not heeded involved the earlier recruitment of visiting professors and stricter standards for the English testing of students. However, in general SPARK has been open to constructive criticisms and has generally tried to implement recommendations from previous years. The quality assurance mechanism of objective external evaluations should be continued in future editions.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

As seen here, ISUM 2007 succeeded in achieving many of its objectives by bringing together international and local teaching staff in an effort to provide a high quality educational experience for students and to advance the Bologna process in the Macedonian higher education system. ISUM also has continued to fulfill its semi-official objectives of bringing together members of Macedonia's two main ethnic groups, providing for a comfortable and safe environment for them to interact and learn together. The many extra-curricular activities, including the excursions, sporting activities, parties, public forums, and field trips certainly helped promote a positive atmosphere among students, and their overall satisfaction rate with the program was high. We strongly recommend that this project be continued and that its funding be secured through new donations and financing from the Macedonian partner institutions.

Our recommendations below are designed to bring about further improvements and enhancements to this program. It is our hope that they can be implemented relatively quickly so that the next edition of ISUM can benefit from our suggestions. These recommendations are divided according to topics and are summarised as follows:

Academic programme

- The first day of the ISUM programme should consist of an introductory period where the courses would be presented to the students in shifts, so that the undecided students get the opportunity to hear several course introductions with the aim of selecting their desired course.
- An academic dean of the ISUM program should be recruited. This individual should have a PhD degree and experience with University teaching outside of Macedonia. This individual would bring much-needed credibility to the program among officials at local Macedonian universities, would oversee the diversification of the curriculum, conduct midterm evaluations at ISUM, and assure the quality of the teaching staff. This person would serve ex officio as chair of the SPARK coordinating committee, which solicits course proposals from participating faculties.

- In the future some of the ISUM courses should be initiated from visiting professors and brought to participating faculties for input and ultimate approval.
- The thematic areas offered in ISUM should be expanded, and ISUM should develop signature interdisciplinary courses that would truly be innovative in their content, teaching methods, and approach. The new thematic areas should include the social sciences, humanities, cultural studies, and the natural sciences.
- The list of three course preferences students make in their application materials should be respected whenever possible. Educational criteria and student preferences should be the primary factor in assigning students to courses, while the need for ethnic diversity in the classroom should be secondary.
- English proficiency tests should be changed and updated every year and stronger efforts must be made to prevent cheating at the tests.

ISUM and the Bologna process

- Active participation from the middle-management level of the university structures--deans, chairs-, heads of departments—is crucial for the quality of change desired by the Bologna process and we strongly recommend that SPARK should concentrate on reaching these people and include them more actively in ISUM activities such as the Bologna workshops.

Courses and syllabi

- The course plans / syllabi developed by the professors should be made available online for participants of the course before the beginning of ISUM.
- SPARK should continue to shift the attention from the input / content issues to the output-type issues (typical student workload, learning outcomes, and student learning experiences). It would be much easier to work with co-professors on

these issues if they would be required/pressed to present their syllabi proposals much earlier than it was the case for ISUM 2007.

- The transparency of learning outcomes and assessment issues must be at the centre of the requirements set for syllabi by SPARK and ISUM for the next year. Properly written learning outcomes should be followed by a detailed description of the ways of how the professor plans to assess student achievement of these outcomes. In addition, such description of assessment must be followed by a clear definition of the assessment and marking criteria which would be presented in advance to students.
- An additional training program for co-professors and other interested instructors from Macedonia focusing on learning outcomes and their link to assessment, and on defining usable and transparent assessment criteria. This training should include individual counselling for co-professors conducted by an expert when the syllabus is being design.
- It would also be advisable for SPARK to publish a small step-by-step booklet/guide to university staff about the use of learning outcomes and assessment criteria in order to make innovations in the courses of study.
- The average student workload based on the answers students provided in the evaluation questionnaires should be calculated for each course and the results should be analyzed together with the co-professors of the courses planned for next year in order to prepare them for ISUM and to make the estimation of the typical student workload easier.
- The midterm evaluation conducted by a member of SPARK's team with professors in the middle of the course showed to be beneficial for the quality of the course and the syllabi and it should be continued in future ISUM editions.

Teaching methods

- The organisers should try to limit the number of the participants per course to 20 participants and discourage transfer between courses in the very late stages of the programme.
- Evaluation scores of individual visiting professors and especially co-professors should be analysed. They should be advised to change something in their teaching style in the case they received negative evaluations.
- SPARK should provide an overview of some of the key questions resulting from the student evaluations of the courses. This additional analysis should focus on the courses with lower overall ratings than the other courses.
- The adaptation of teaching contents and methods based on intercultural and interethnic considerations should be reinforced in the process of preparing teaching staff for the work at ISUM. Adhering to a policy of "neutrality" of contents and methods in this respect does not bring added value to the learning about other people, their cultures and ways or reasoning.

Transfer of credits

- SPARK should initiate the signing of a special legal agreement between SPARK and the four Macedonian universities, which would guarantee that they will recognize the credits and courses of ISUM or that they will at least be obliged to declare in advance which courses can be recognized as part of their study programmes.

Bologna workshops

- Instead of general workshops about some of the Bologna process action lines which were attended usually by those already supporting reforms in the educational practice, more targeted programme/faculty based workshops should be organized. These workshops should have both local and external resource persons/trainers, should be focused on the reform of curricula of the specific department and should be organised with the help of the co-professors who taught at ISUM.

Venue

- SPARK should organize a visit to the computer facilities some weeks in advance with some of the co-professors teaching a course with information technology requirements, so that they can check up the available software and better prepare for the teaching at ISUM with their visiting professors.
- Some of the computers available to students should include internet access

Accommodation and Food

- SPARK should hire additional cleaning personnel if necessary.
- A room plan must be made in advance and ethnically mixed accommodations for the participants organized if possible.
- The welcome and registration desk should be better organized and staffed; the initial frustration and waiting for hours after arrival for the name-tag and accommodation should be prevented.
- SPARK should fund at least some additional nutritious refreshments for students, such as fruits and healthy snacks.
- The number of participants should be decreased slightly in order to allow more investment into better food during ISUM or more adequate accommodation for students. SPARK should make a detailed cost–benefit analysis of such a solution.

Final version submitted by:

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