



## **What Role Do Croatian Higher Institution Play? A study on University Civic Mission**

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### **Quotation information**

LEDIC, Jasminka; CULUM, Bojana; NUZDIC, Sandra; JANCEC, Lucija (2008), "What Role Do Croatian Higher Institution Play? A study on University Civic Mission". *Proceedings of the 4th International Barcelona Conference on Higher Education, Vol. 8. Higher education and citizenship, participation and democracy*. Barcelona: GUNI. Available at <http://www.guni-rmies.net>.

### **Abstract**

The social context in Croatia in which universities operate shows two dominant trends. Market orientation is being promoted as a response to globalization processes. Growing resistance and concern about this tendency brought initiatives to strengthen civil engagement in higher education. Since academic knowledge is increasingly expected to be based on real life circumstances and connected to practice, the need to strengthen civic engagement, social responsibility and active citizenship at universities is further stimulated. Requests are being made to bring university instructors and practitioners into closer relationships, expecting academic knowledge to directly improve living conditions in local communities and affect democracy and civil society development (Ostrander, 2004). Students should acquire knowledge, develop skills and opinions through active participation, which in turn develops their sense of active involvement in making political decisions and controlling its implementations. Many authors agree how active citizenship is the ideal contemporary society should aspire to (T.H.McLaughlin, D. Miller, C.Wilkins, R.Griffith, D. Heather, K. Faulks). The purpose of university's civic mission is to enable the development of this ideal.

Recent research studies on civil society in Croatia reveal numerous challenges. In the report on CIVICUS Index on Civil Society in Croatia (2003-2005) authors state a weak concern for social problems testifying that citizens do not feel obligated and responsible for solving problems in their communities. Furthermore, the concept of civic engagement is not a part of educational programs and Croatian socio-cultural background is more inclined to encourage passivity than inventiveness and confidence in citizens. The results show a need for permanent strengthening of civic engagement with social and community problems in Croatia. It is reasonable and justified to expect of universities to take the responsibility to become the leaders of social change.

Civic engagement and social responsibility of universities have not yet succeeded to stimulate considerable interest in the Croatian academic community, so the "holy trinity" of university mission (Checkoway, 2001) – research, teaching and

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community service – is still not the focus of interest. Data on civic engagement efforts at universities are scarce. Nevertheless, experience and analyses of current priorities show that Croatian universities support research and teaching, while they usually disregard community service.

The research project “University and its external environment in the context of European integration processes”, conducted at University of Rijeka, examines, among other things, the state of engagement of Croatian universities in the civic mission. University civic mission is understood as efforts of the academic community conducted through research, teaching and active involvement of its members in the community, and directed towards improving the quality of life in the community and educating active and socially responsible citizens (Ledic, 2007). Our research includes the analysis of prerequisites for establishing civic engagement at Croatian universities on following levels: (I) Legal acts, (II) Teaching, (III) Research, (IV) Community service and (V) Governance. Our standpoint is that the academic community needs to actively contribute to the quality of community life and encourage education of active and socially responsible citizens through its regular academic activities which, in turn, contribute to participation and development of democratic processes in society.

The analysis of legal acts (Law on Higher Education, university and faculty statutes) indicates insufficient usage of given legislation. Legal (statutory) regulations which recommend governance participation of both professors and students are often not in agreement with reality and current practice (Ledic, 2007). According to laws and other documents, higher education is based on “interactions with social community” and “higher education institutions are obligated to develop social responsibility in students and other members of the academic and scientific community” (Article 2), emphasizing how “university achieves its purposes in accordance with the needs of its local community” (Article 3). We analyzed faculty statutes on the basis of three main indicators: contribution to community development, active citizenship and social responsibility. All three indicators were analyzed through four sub-indicators: teaching, research, community service and governance. It is to no surprise that the formulations found in the 24 analyzed statutes of all seven Croatian universities are in accordance with principles proclaimed in the law. However, the following findings emerged: (I) The

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general absence of university mission statements, (II) Analyzed statutes and their acts indicate a similarity in their formulation, (III) The role of university in improving community life have been stated in all statutes but only as a mere phrase.

In the second phase of the project we examined student attitudes about university (civic) mission. The analysis included the level of student participation in implementing the principles of civic engagement. The sample in this pilot-research consisted of 192 students from all ten schools at the University of Rijeka. A questionnaire surveyed students' experiences and attitudes on important aspects of university activities including research, teaching, community service and governance. Characteristics such as gender, achievement and membership in (student) organizations have not proven relevant, while statistically significant differences are seen across different schools. For example, students at the Faculty of Medicine have far more experience in participating in scientific projects and, in relation to other students, they rate these projects as having a positive impact on identified community problems and needs. On the other hand, humanities students evaluate their own institutions in terms of teaching quality and consider that teaching affects the acquisition of knowledge and skills for active citizenship, social responsibility, civic rights and commitments. One of the important preliminary results indicates a low level of student participation in core academic activities, especially research (M=1.6). Bearing in mind that participation is considered a basis for the development of democracy, it becomes evident how students do not have (enough) possibilities to acquire (and practice) participation skills. It is of significance to state the division of student opinions in relation to university role. Even though they recognize the importance of university social responsibility and see the need to encourage student participation in all academic activities, they still predominantly believe that the role of higher education is primarily to provide opportunities for acquiring expert knowledge and qualifications for the labor market. Students notice lack of dedication of university civic mission through teaching as well. Only a small number of university courses include service learning (M=2.1), or offer extracurricular activities which promote the values of active citizenship. A positive aspect in this context is finding that students notice a motivational potential of their active engagement in community through

various projects and curricular activities (M=4.3). This led us to conclude that universities in Croatia should develop and promote mechanism with the purpose of encouraging and strengthening student participation processes in core academic activities.

This brief overview of the pilot-research results indicates that Croatian universities need to undergo a complex and difficult process of strengthening the academic community to promote civic engagement. Our research raises more questions than it provides answers, but certainly represents an important step in analyzing present processes which promote civic engagement and social responsibility at universities. Future research activities will include analyzing the curricula of Croatian universities and examining experiences and attitudes of university professors to determine to what extent is their civic engagement encouraged through adequate organizational culture and if they are inclined to encourage civic engagement in students.

### **Introduction**

One of the fundamental questions steering the existing (and always revisited) debate on the university role can be (of course, with a grain of salt) reduced to a matter of simple dichotomy – knowledge as a “good” on the market, or knowledge as a public good. Even though the processes we are witnessing contribute to an even more market oriented higher education, at the same growing resistance and concern brought initiatives to strengthen civic engagement in higher education. A social context in which universities operate, and which shows the need for civic engagement, is connected with the critical perspective of academic knowledge. Since academic knowledge is increasingly expected to be based on real life circumstances and connected to practice, the need to strengthen civic engagement at universities is further stimulated. Requests are being made to bring university teachers and practitioners into closer relationships, expecting academic knowledge to directly improve living conditions in local communities and affect democracy and civil society development (Ostrander, 2004). Students should acquire knowledge, develop skills and opinions through active participation, which in turn develops their sense of active involvement in making



political decisions and controlling its implementations. The purpose of university civic mission is to enable the development of this ideal. These initiatives were encouraged by the understanding of civic engagement as vital for the development of democratic society, but that unfortunately an increasing number of citizens refuse to participate in activities relevant for the public good. Thus for example recent research studies on civil society in Croatia reveal numerous challenges. In the report on CIVICUS Index on Civil Society in Croatia (2003-2005) authors state a weak concern for social problems testifying that citizens do not feel responsible for solving problems in their communities. The results show a need for permanent strengthening of civic engagement with social and community problems in Croatia. It is reasonable and justified to expect of universities to take the responsibility to become the leaders of social change. That this is not a novelty when it comes to the purpose of universities it is evident in Magna Charta (1988), without a doubt a crucial document determining the principles of the contemporary role of European universities. It is evident that Magna Charta has unambiguously defined the role of universities: it is indicated in the preamble that universities must serve the society as a whole, and must give future generations education that will teach them to respect the harmony of the natural environment and of life itself. The matter of civic engagement and social responsibility of universities has not yet succeeded to stimulate considerable interest in the Croatian academic community. It is therefore hard to find data on what universities have done concerning this issue and it is where the basic motivation for our research lays. This research raises more questions than it provides answers, but certainly represents an important step in analyzing present processes which promote civic engagement at Croatian universities.

### **Research results**

The research project “University and its community in the context of European integration process”, examines, within the scope of civic mission research, prerequisites for civic engagement at Croatian universities. University civic mission is understood as efforts of the academic community conducted through research, teaching and active involvement of its members in the community, and directed

towards improving the quality of life in the community and educating active and socially responsible citizens (Ledic, 2007). The focal issue addressed in this work is that academic community needs to actively contribute to the quality of community life. Regular academic activities should encourage education of active and socially responsible citizens by thus contributing to the development of democratic processes. The research includes the analysis of prerequisites for civic engagement at Croatian universities of the following: (I) Legislation, (II) Research, (III), Teaching, (IV) Community service and (V) Governance.<sup>1</sup>

### **Discovering the “public” in legislation**

In the first part of the research we tried to establish legal assumptions for university civic mission in crucial documents regulating higher education in Croatia - Law on Higher Education (2003) and faculty statutes. It is important to state that this analysis represents only results of document analysis, and not the practices of civic engagement. International research studies show an imbalance in universities' fundamental activities. This “holy trinity” (Checkoway, B. 2001) is usually distributed among university priorities in such a way that it is evident how universities cherish research the most, less teaching, but usually neglect community service. It is hard to correlate these results with the national context because of lack of similar researches. However, legislation points out that higher education in Croatia is based on “interactions with social community” and that “higher education institutions are obligated to develop social responsibility in students and other members of the academic and scientific community” (Article 2), emphasizing that “university performs its tasks in accordance with the needs of the community in which it acts” (Article 3) and that “academic freedoms, academic self-government and university autonomy shall also include the responsibility of the academic community towards the social community in which it acts” (Article 4). These legal formulations indicate that legislation provides for an area of defining the civic mission and strongly expects universities to promote social responsibility and stronger connections with the community. Apart from

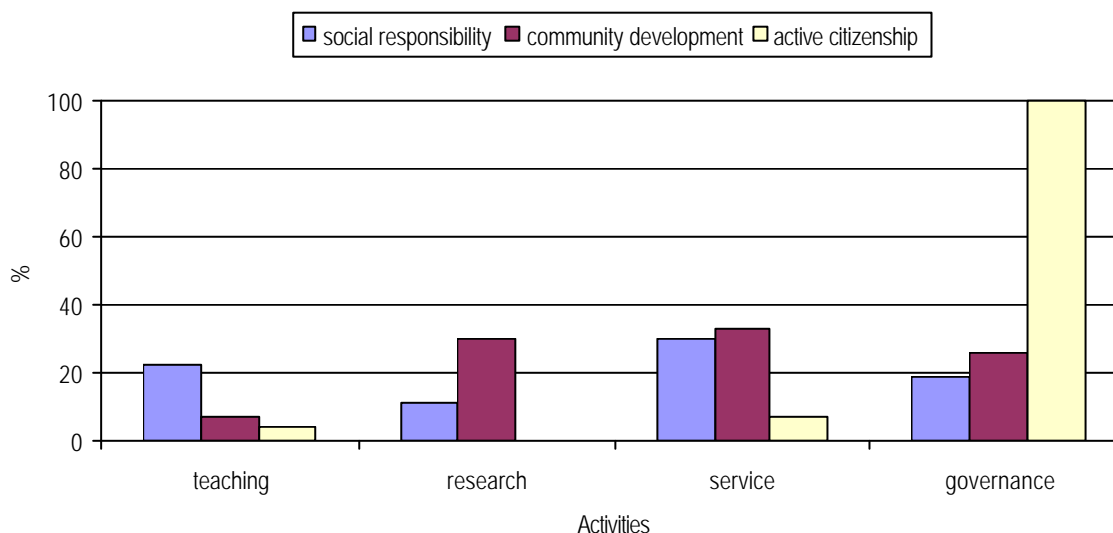
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<sup>1</sup> In this paper we present only results that define students' perspective. Future research activities will focus on examining experiences and attitudes of university professors.



the Law, we analyzed statutes of seven universities<sup>2</sup> and 27 faculties. We analyzed statutes on the basis of three main indicators: contribution to community development, active citizenship and social responsibility, further analyzed through teaching, research, community service and governance. Both a qualitative and quantitative analysis was conducted analyzing full statutory texts and singling out parts of articles which clearly illustrated the defined indicators and activities.<sup>3</sup> It is to no surprise that the formulations found in the 27 statutes of all faculties are almost identical with both principles proclaimed in the Law and with each other. Statutes' accordance with the Law is expected but literary identical statutes indicate that they are most likely copied, written to satisfy the norm, and most importantly, lacking in authentic approach in defining university mission. Croatian universities do not differ in terms of their mission and merely copying formulations makes their founding charters insensitive to the specific needs of the institution and the profession.

The results of the analysis can be found in the following chart and table.



**Chart 1. Analysis of founding charters – main indicators and activities**

<sup>2</sup> There are currently 113 higher education institutions in Croatia but we narrowed our analysis to the statutes of faculties which are a part of the seven universities.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to state that we soon, respecting the national context of higher education, opted for a less restrictive approach of analysis allowing those formulations that only through phrases and descriptive elements illustrate the defined indicators.



**Table 1. Statute analysis according to indicators and activities**

Main indicators	Activities	% / N
<b>COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT</b>	teaching	7.4 % (2/27)
	research	29.6 % (8/27)
	community	33.3 % (9/27)
	governance	25.9 % (7/27)
<b>ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP</b>	teaching	3.7 % (1/27)
	research	0 % (0/27)
	community	7.4 % (2/27)
	governance	100 % (27/27)
<b>SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY</b>	teaching	22.2 % (6/27)
	research	11.1 % (3/27)
	community	29.6 % (8/27)
	governance	18.5 % (5/27)

The results of statute analysis<sup>4</sup> indicate the least legal assumptions in the *Contribution to community development* through teaching (7,4%), and the most through community development (33,3%).

Some of the singled out examples of statutes demonstrating the expected community contribution legislation imposed on university:

- *"Higher education shall be based on the interaction with the social community and the obligation to develop social responsibility of students and other members of the academic community."*
- *"Universities shall carry out research programs of strategic interest for the Republic of Croatia, and focus their attention on the development of regional and local communities."*
- *"According to its fundamental principles of activity, the Faculty raises students to be conscientious and ethical citizens compliant with the code of conduct for academic citizens."*

<sup>4</sup> In this paper only an overview of the basic findings will be presented.

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When it comes to the *Active citizenship* indicator it is important to notice the discrepancy in the results. That is to say, results obtained for research are 0% and for governance 100%. None of the analyzed statutes had recognized the need to advocate civic engagement of teachers and students through research projects. A high percentage obtained for governance can be explained by the fact that all statutes, identically, expect students to participate in the decision making processes.

While analyzing the *Social responsibility* indicator we found the least legal assumptions defined for research activities (11.1%), and the most for community engagement (29.6%). Only three statutes have clearly defined obligations in terms of research activities and responsibility scientist should foster for the community. The element of social responsibility in teaching (22.5%) is fairly high in relation to teaching analyzed within the other two indicators.

Some of the singled out examples of statutes demonstrating university social responsibility:

- *"The Faculty shall encourage and acknowledge specific national contents, the interaction with the community and the development of social responsibility in students and other members of the academic and scientific community."*
- *"The Faculty shall convey research results to practice. For that purpose it shall: work on developing research and development projects for its own needs and the needs of the community."*
- *"Academic freedoms, self-government and university autonomy shall also include the responsibility of the academic community towards the social community in which it acts."*

The results of the analysis indicate a general absence of university (civic) mission statements. Analyzed statutes confirm a great similarity in their formulation and lack of statements that are in favor of differences between universities. Statutes lack satisfactory indicators which would prove a clear connection between faculty's fundamental activities and the community.

### **Civic dimension in university activities - students' perspective**

In the second phase of the project we examined student attitudes and experience in relation to civic dimension in four activities: research, teaching, community service and student participation in governance. The sample consisted of 192 students from all ten faculties at the University of Rijeka. The decision of the researcher was to conduct this part of the analysis on only one university and we are aware of the restrictions the decision might impose. Except according to the faculty, the analysis was conducted according to gender, achievement and membership in organizations<sup>5</sup>. The sample is homogenous according to the year of study because all the examinees are third year students. The examinees were offered statements in each category to determine the degree of their agreement using a scale from 0 to 5. The value 0 meaning "I do not know/ I am not interested"<sup>6</sup> while values from 1 to 5 ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Each category provided an open-ended question to allow students to additionally elaborate their attitudes and experience

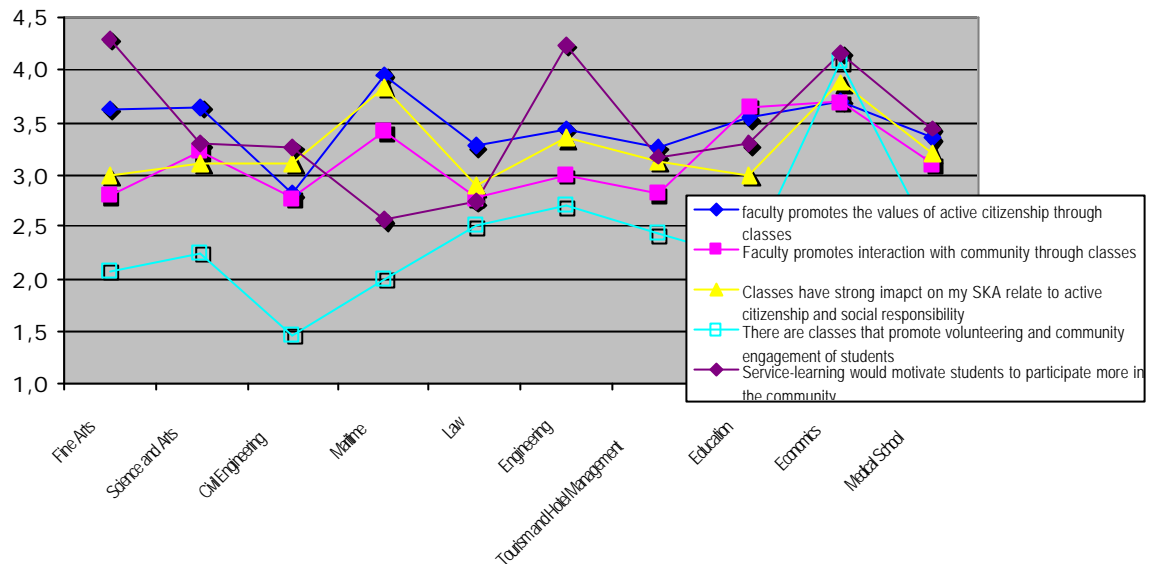
### **Experience and attitudes about the civic dimension in teaching**

Within this part we examined student attitudes and experience about the values promoted through teaching, the effects of acquiring knowledge and skills for active citizenship and social responsibility and established cooperation with the community.

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<sup>5</sup> According to a total of 181 responses, only 10% are members of different (student) NGOs.

<sup>6</sup> The value 0 was introduced in order to further examine student attitudes and get an insight into the amount of information and the level of interest they have for certain research questions. This paper will not deal with the analysis of this category.



**Graph 2. Experience and attitudes about faculty teaching – median per faculty**

While analyzing civic dimension of teaching, characteristics like gender, achievement and membership in organizations have not been proven relevant, while statistically significant differences are evident between faculties. Among all faculties, Faculty of Economics should be especially pointed out<sup>7</sup>. It has a high average of  $M=3.7$  concerning the statement *My faculty encourages interaction with the community through teaching (e.g., visiting lectures on topics important for the community etc.)* while the average of all faculties is  $M=2.8$ . Likewise, while estimating the level teaching has on acquiring knowledge and skills for active citizenship and social responsibility, Economics students have a high average of  $M=3.9$  when the average of all faculties is  $M=3.0$ . The biggest statistically significant difference is evident on the statement *My faculty has courses which offer students, in addition to lectures, possibilities of learning through community service (e.g. volunteering and/or participating in conducting*

<sup>7</sup> We did an additional and thorough analysis of Faculty of Economics course programs in order to find the reasons for this discrepancy. The results show a certain popularity of the Strategic Management course available for senior students. The implementation of service learning was considered to be optimal and obviously recognized among students as a method that successfully links teaching with the community.

*research of relevance for the community*) having the lowest average value among all faculties (M=2.1) but quite high average value for the Faculty of Economics (M=4.1). Students obviously do not recognize elements of civic engagement in current university teaching. A positive aspect in this context is finding that students notice a motivational potential of their active engagement in community through various projects and curricular activities (M=4.3).

The questionnaire continued with an open-ended question on the role of teaching in encouraging students to take a role of an active citizen. We single out some of student comments:

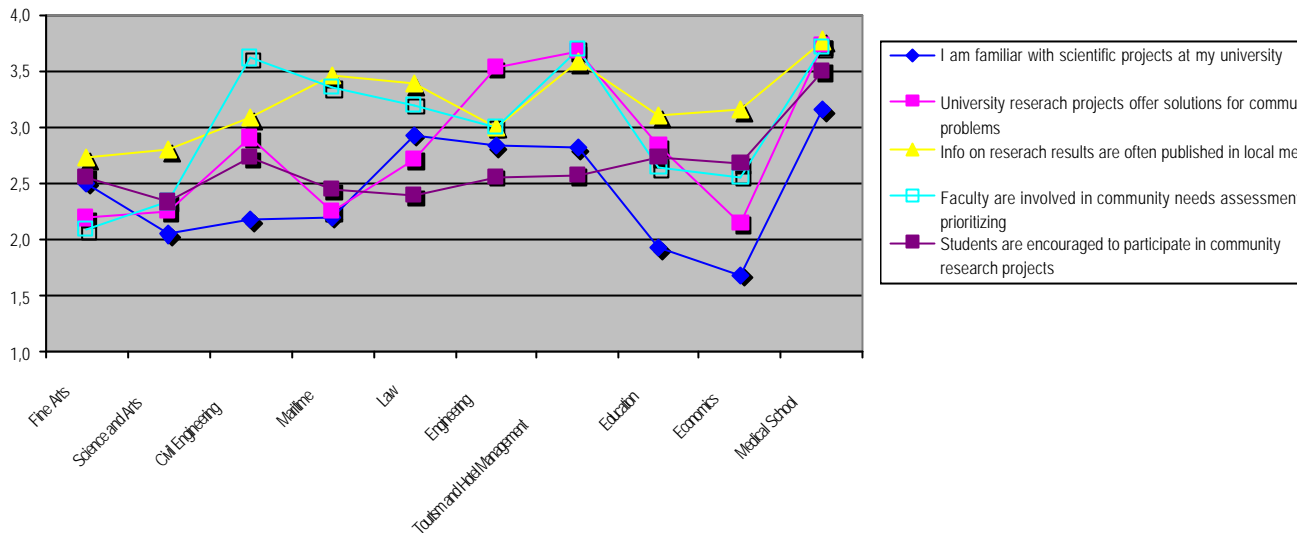
- *'I think it is important to steer students through teaching to become active citizens because that would make them always know what is happening and able to help the ones in need.'*
- *'This should be one of community goals because this is the only way to produce change. Professors should talk about community problems during lectures and how students can affect those changes.'*

We draw your attention to comments of students who believe that teachers do not need to deal with issues concerning students' social responsibility:

- *'I do not think it is important. Studying for exams is what is important and people who are studying are capable of making their own decisions whether to be active or not, regardless of the faculty.'*
- *I do not think this is only the role of faculties; I think it is more an individual duty of every student.'*

### ***Experience and attitudes about the civic dimension in research***

Within these questions we examined student attitudes and experience about the connection of research with community needs as well as the application of its results, and the possibilities of student participation.



**Graph 3. Experience and attitudes about faculty research work – median per faculty**

Characteristics such as gender, achievement and membership in (student) organizations have not been proven relevant, while statistically significant differences can be seen again across different faculties. Students of the Faculty of Medicine gave the highest marks to all statements – they are familiar with scientific projects their professors implement ( $M=3.2$ ), have far more experience in participating in projects ( $M=3.5$ ), and rate these projects as having a positive impact on identified community problems ( $M=3.7$ ). One of the important preliminary results indicates a very low level of student participation in research ( $M=1.6$ ). Bearing in mind that participation is considered a basis for the development of democracy, it becomes evident how students do not have (enough) possibilities to acquire participation skills.

An open-ended question on the importance of including students in research work and the concern of the community needs and problems while developing research projects gave us 111 out of 192 comments or 57.81%. Slightly more than a half of students which gave their comment believe it is important to take into account community needs in planning research projects and to include students. Some of singled out comments:

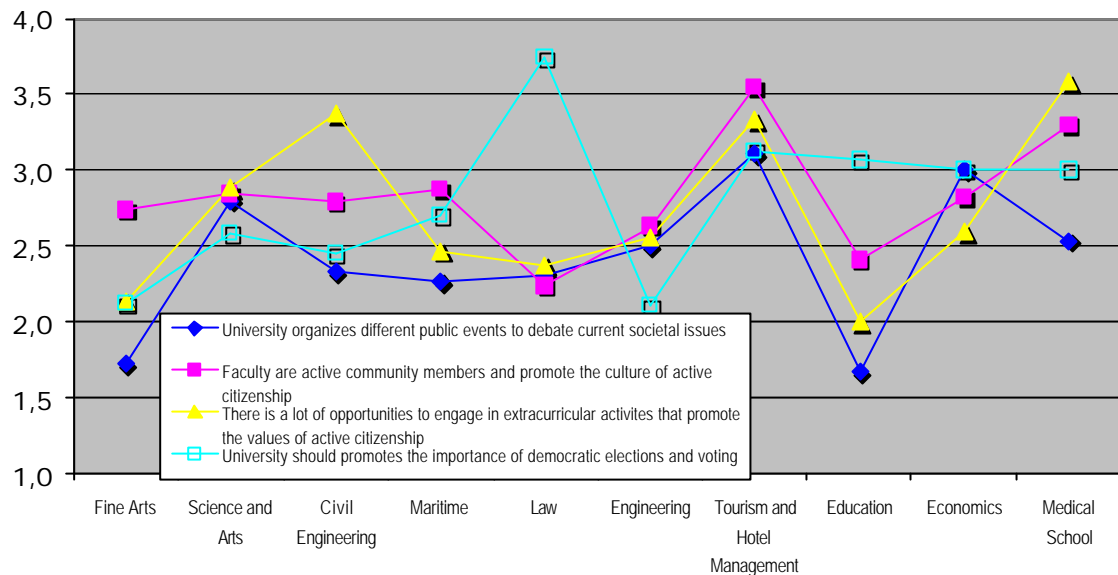


- *'I think involving students in research is important because it prepares them for their future life. Their responsibility and community engagement should be encouraged.'*
- *'The faculty and community have to first define the places of their interaction, getting both aspects of society accustomed to one another. The intellectual snobbism on one hand and petty bourgeois on the other equally stifle the interaction process.'*

### **Experience and attitudes about community service**

In this section we examined the student connection with the community through engagement in (student) organizations, extracurricular activities as well as university and community cooperation in discussing economic and social problems. Special attention was given to examining student participation in faculty activities, for example, participating at public lectures and round tables, organized volunteering and research on the community needs and problems. The faculty is expectedly a source of statistically significant differences. Students of the Faculty of Medicine and Academy of Fine Arts are more often encouraged to volunteer in the community ( $M=2.7$  in relation to the average value of all faculties  $M=1.8$ ). A statistically significant difference is evident in the analysis of membership in organizations. Accordingly, members of organizations participate significantly more in the before mentioned activities than student non-members. Although, it can be concluded that students do not consider faculties as places where the culture of active participation in the community is being promoted. This is proven by a low average value of their engagement (encouraged by the faculty), especially when it comes to conducting research based on the community needs and problems ( $M=1.6$ ).





**Graph 4. Experience and attitudes about community service – median per faculty**

In this section the open-ended question tackled the role of faculties in encouraging students to actively participate in the community they live in. We single out comments of students who consider the faculty's duty to promote community service:

- *'Of course it is important that the faculty encourages students to actively contribute to the community because students will one day be a part of the same community and put efforts into making the community work best.'*
- *'Yes, I think faculties should encourage students to actively contribute to their community. Better ways should be found to attract student attention and interest them for the community life.'*
- *'This is surely one of faculty's duties not being implemented in practice.'*

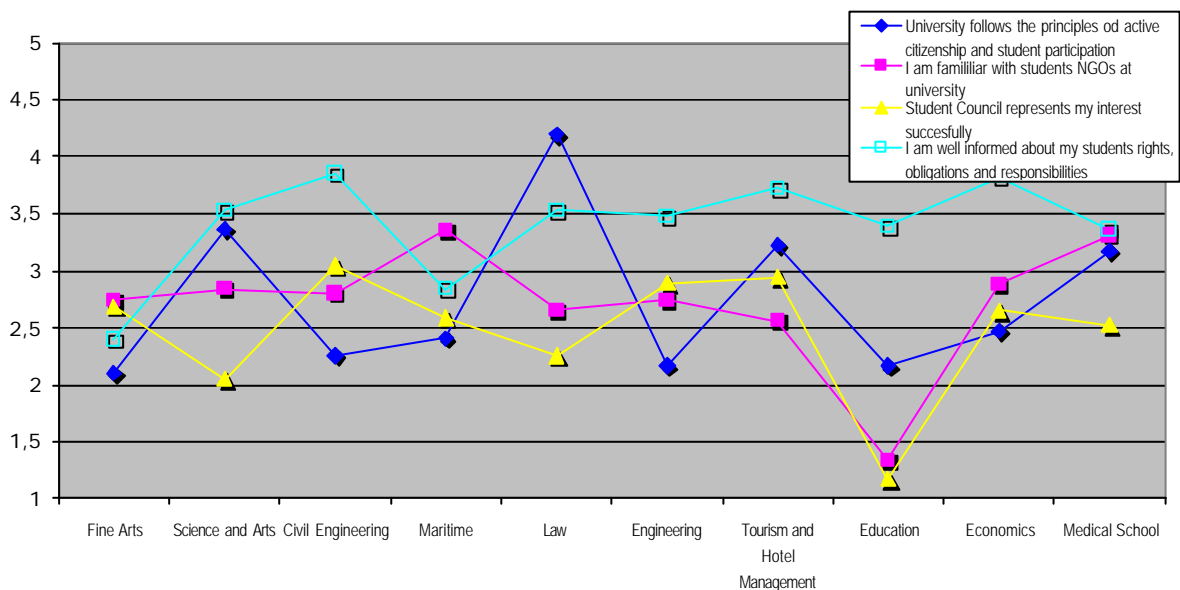
We draw your attention to comments of students who do not recognize the role of faculties in this respect:

- *'This is something students should be aware thanks to their upbringing, the faculty cannot impose it.'*
- *'I do not think that this is a faculty's duty, especially not my faculty. Maybe this is more an issue for the faculties of humanities.'*

- *'I think not, because the community students live in has nothing to do with the university.'*

### Experience and attitudes about faculty governing bodies and the culture of governance

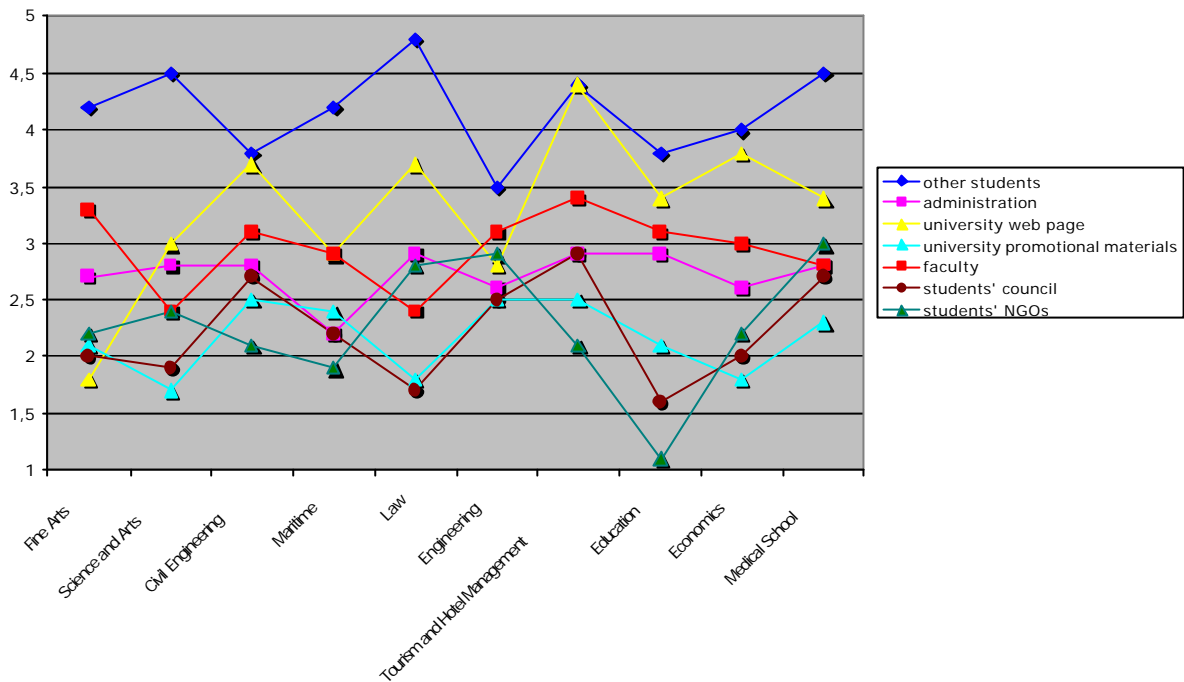
In this section we examined the perception of student governing bodies and familiarity with student rights, commitments and responsibilities with special emphasis on information sources. In the domain of promoting the culture of governance we wanted to know if promoting civil rights, commitments and responsibilities were recognized as faculty goals. It is interesting to see that Law students graded this with the highest mark (M=4.2). A worrying result obtained is that students generally do not trust student governing bodies because of their poor performance in representing students' best interests (M=2.7).



**Graph 5. Experience and attitudes on governing bodies and the culture of governance – median per faculty**

In the section of examining the sources of information on student rights and obligations, the examinees should have stated the importance of each of the mentioned sources – other students, administration, web site, university publications and advertising,

university professors, student governing bodies (Student Council) and student organizations.



**Graph 6. Sources of information about student rights and obligations – median per faculty**

Gender, achievement and membership in organizations have again proven less relevant characteristics in relation to faculty which offers statistically significant differences. In general, the most significant high average grade goes to “other students” (M=4.2), and the lowest to “student organizations” (M=2.3), “university publications” (M=2.2) and “Student Council” (M=2.2). This result shows neglect in one of the fundamental activities of student organizations, which is not so alarming considering student organizations are mostly founded with the purpose of promoting the profession. However, very low grades given to the only governing student body indicates a neglect in basic activities of the Student Council determined in the statute questioning thus the very reasons for its existence.

Students were asked to give their comments about the role students have in the faculty’s governing structure. We draw your attention to some comments:

- *‘The faculty should let it be known that the attitudes and opinions of students are also relevant in the decision making and governance processes.’*
- *‘First of all, active and successful participation of students in governance depends on students’ ambitions. If I know my work will serve some good and that faculty representatives value my opinion, I am ready to actively participate. But students often feel like pawns in the governance structure and are not willing to make an effort.’*
- *‘I doubt this could even be considered desirable, because as far as I know, professors, at least the majority of them, consider themselves gods and want to leave it at that.’*

### **Suggestions and recommendations for improving the civic dimension in university activities**

Students had a possibility to offer their suggestions for improving the civic dimension in all university activities examined by answering a special question within all open-ended questions. When asked about the possibilities to raise student awareness about the importance of their civic responsibility and to encourage active citizenship through teaching, only 42 out of 192 examinees offered suggestions (21.85% of examinees). So few suggestions surely proves that students hardly think of themselves as active participants in teaching and do not recognize community inclusive teaching models. Student recommendations can be found in the table that follows.

**Table 2. Recommendations for encouraging active citizenship through teaching**

Recommendations	N	%
Include field work	16	38,09
More lectures, discussions and panel discussions about these issues	9	21,42
Better communication with professors and their easier accessibility	3	7,14
Other	14	33,33
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>99,98</b>

When asked about the possibilities of strengthening the cooperation between the faculty and community through research projects and student participation, students gave the least comments – only 24 students out of 192 had specific recommendations, i.e. only 12.5%. On one hand, this shows a lack of knowledge about the purpose of research work, but also that students cannot think of models (of improving) the faculty and community cooperation in this field. Student recommendations can be found in the table that follows.

**Table 3. Recommendations for encouraging cooperation between research and community**

Recommendations	N	%
Greater community and faculty awareness about topics of mutual interest	6	25,00
Encourage more student projects	4	16,66
Enhance material conditions (more staff, more space)	3	12,50
More consistent implementation of the reformed system	2	8,33
Other	9	37,50
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>99,99</b>

When asked about the faculty mechanisms which encourage student engagement in the community they live in, only 28 students out of 192 gave an answer or 14.58%. So few suggestions indicates a general low understanding of the concept of active community engagement. Student recommendations can be found in the table that follows.

**Table 4. Recommendations for more active student contributions to the community**

Recommendations	N	%
Activities like debates and workshops	8	28,57
Class participation with the emphasis on critical thinking	5	17,85
Financial resources improvement	3	10,71
Other	12	42,85
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>99,98</b>

The last question, about student participation in faculty governing structures, got the most answers – 83 out of 192 or 43.22%. Even though still a fairly small amount of recommendations, it significantly outnumbers the recommendations given in previous questions. We can thus conclude that students are more active in thinking about their role in the governing process of (the educational) system they are currently a part of than social responsibility and the roles they assume or will soon assume in the community. Student recommendations can be found in the table that follows.

**Table 5. Recommendations for more successful student participation in faculty governing structures**

Recommendations	N	%
Improve the quality of information sources	21	25,30
Better student position	12	14,45
Better communication between students and professors	7	8,43
More student participation and influence (Student Council)	7	8,43
Put more effort in motivating students	5	6,02

Better conditions for studying	5	6,02
More joint workshops for students and professors	3	3,61
I don't know	9	10,84
Other	14	16,86
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>99,96</b>

### Conclusion

The analysis of the Law on Higher Education shows clearly that it is expected of the academic community to promote social responsibility (primarily among student population) and integrate regular activities in the community. The statutes, proven less in teaching and research, emphasise the importance of student participation in governance structures and processes. A comparative analysis of the statutes and student attitudes resulted in finding certain connection. It is interesting to observe quantitative relations of the both components analysed: statutes lack in indicators which would clearly demonstrate a connection between teaching and research on one, and the community on the other hand. This finding is in accordance with a small number of student recommendations in the same categories and indicates their weak awareness of possible models of stronger integration into community through research and teaching. A significant problem of insufficient student involvement will be further analysed in the subsequent phase of research when university teachers' attitudes on university civic engagement will be examined. However, we cannot but question ourselves if student attitudes are (by coincidence?) connected with the arguments of a critical position directed towards the role of science in Croatia which is seen as not encouraging enough social changes nor offering solutions for the existing challenges. Even more interesting is a certain discrepancy in governance, which is excellently represented and elaborated in the statutes. On the other hand, insight into student comments and recommendations leads us to conclude how they are least satisfied with exactly the governance and offer, not only the most comments, but recommendations as well for successful inclusion of students in the governing structures. Furthermore, it



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is of significance to state the division of student opinions in relation to university role. Even though they recognize the importance of university social responsibility and see the need to encourage student participation in all academic activities, they still predominantly believe that the role of higher education is exclusively to provide opportunities for acquiring expert knowledge and qualifications for the labor market. In contrast, the Bologna process initiated the curriculum reform, introducing a student-oriented studying, interactive teaching, and urging for higher level of student involvement in all activities based on learning outcomes – knowledge, skills and competencies for active participation in creating (European) democratic society. The same principles are proclaimed in many documents. Thus for example in the report on Key competences for lifelong learning in Europe<sup>8</sup> it is indicated that key competences are those that serve for personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment and are prerequisites for an effective and constructive participation in social and working life in a knowledge society. In the majority of the western countries education for active citizenship is found on lower levels of education making students (more or less) familiar with the models of active participation. This is not the case with Croatia which has to be observed as an additional challenge for higher education when students, apparently for the first time, start to encounter some of the models which foster social responsibility and civic engagement. This led us to conclude that universities in Croatia should develop and promote mechanism with the purpose of encouraging and strengthening student participation in core academic activities. This brief overview of the pilot-research results indicates that Croatian universities need to undergo a complex and difficult process of strengthening the academic community to promote civic engagement.

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<sup>8</sup> See: European Commission (2006). European Union Framework of Key Competencies for Life Long Learning. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 18 December 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning [Official Journal L 394 of 30 December 2006].



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