

THE FUTURE OF UFSIA

The need and desire for integration

In the past years, there has been growing interest from UFSIA for a further integration into the University of Antwerp. The changing role of the church and such religious communities as the Society of Jesus has prompted reflection on how UFSIA should be embedded in the broader society in the future. A confederate structure comprised of three autonomous institutions was deemed untenable in the medium-long term.

The following arguments can be put forward in defence of a unified University of Antwerp.

- International, European, national and regional co-operation are necessary in order for a university centre of excellence to be able to participate in the single European educational and research market. The implementation of the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations regarding the establishment of a single European educational market makes co-operation and the creation of larger, more competitive, units indispensable. The current confederate structure of the University of Antwerp is too fragmented in order to develop a successful strategy whereby the University of Antwerp could manifest itself more effectively as a quality university of European stature.
- The concrete implementation of the Bologna Declaration necessitates the forging of associations and the building of bridges towards institutions of higher education in cross-network co-operation agreements. A unified and pluralistic University of Antwerp offers the various partners from higher education better guarantees of quality, stability and retention of their singularity.
- The present confederate structure of the University of Antwerp is confusing to the outside world, and it lacks a clearly recognisable profile. A university that exhibits a high degree of coherence and an unequivocally high scientific profile, and in addition sets itself very concrete educational goals, will offer better quality guarantees to matriculants, students and their potential employers alike.
- Pluralism, in the sense of a truly content-related dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual respect for one another's ideologies, may represent a bonus for qualitatively high educational and scientific work.
- Societal support for retaining the three autonomous institutions has become limited. Interested parties in university activities (corporate life, socio-economic organisations, political circles, etc) are more inclined to support a unified University of Antwerp than each of the three institutions separately.
- Scale increases through the merger of three separate institutions into a single university will make it possible to realise synergies with regard to education, research, management and administration.
- A streamlining of the managerial structure will make it possible to direct the administrative efforts more clearly towards the strategic positioning of the

university of Antwerp while taking into account external developments and changes. A clear external orientation is necessary in order to turn the University of Antwerp into a learning institution that pays due attention to the changing needs of students, as well as to evolutions in scientific research and to constantly developing societal needs. The implementation of the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations, and the ensuing changes to higher education in Europe, will make a single vision and a single strategy quite indispensable.

- Technological innovation in education, research and administration necessitates a level of investment that the institutions would find almost impossible to bear independently. A concerted effort -not just within the context of the university institutions of Antwerp but quite likely beyond these institutions too- is therefore required.

A Jesuit-inspired university project nevertheless has much to offer. Inducing commitment to other people in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel, promoting independence of mind, striving for excellence and quality, and inspiring young people to subscribe to such a project through persuasion and example are all as relevant as ever.

A double strategy

On the basis of these observations, UFSIA decided to develop a proactive double strategy, consisting of two inextricably related components, namely:

1. To subsume all academic education, scientific research and service provisions within a unified pluralistic University of Antwerp, where there is room for ideological discourse and in which the Christian philosophy and tradition on which UFSIA is grounded are embedded;
2. To create a fully-fledged international and multidisciplinary forum through the establishment of a centre of thought (Universitair Centrum Sint-Ignatius Antwerpen – UCSIA) that complements and supports the University of Antwerp. This Centre is to be created within the framework of a Christian ethos and a spirit of openness and tolerance, in co-operation with the Society of Jesus and the members of the university community of Antwerp.

Integration into the University of Antwerp

Negotiations with the sister institutions on the realisation of an integrated University of Antwerp should be concluded by June 2002.

UFSIA is only prepared to participate in a unified University of Antwerp if this institution is developed into a pluralistic university that is actively and institutionally concerned with ideological discourse. This entails that the unified university should, among other things, be founded on the principle of active participation in policy formation on the part of all segments of staff. It should have a simple and transparent managerial structure with a broad societal representation, including a representative of the founding fathers of UFSIA, i.e. the Society of Jesus. The University of Antwerp must be run in a spirit of tolerance and pluralism, without dominance of any one ideological or political persuasion.

Furthermore, the University of Antwerp must be prepared to enter into the international academic partnerships to which UFSIA belongs, particularly the international network of Jesuit universities. Students must be allowed to participate maximally in international exchange and co-operation programmes so that they could develop an open and global perspective. The University of Antwerp must pay special attention to the reception and counselling of first-year students, students from ethnic minority backgrounds, socio-economically deprived students and students from developing countries.

It must also be possible for a multidisciplinary and pluralistic centre for ethical and ideological issues to function within the University of Antwerp. Moreover, room must be created in all curricula for the retention or further expansion of specific educational components relating to fundamental philosophy, ethics and the philosophy of science.

Continuity of the SJ-project

Within the framework of the University of Antwerp, the separate SJ-project may be propagated through individual behaviour in the spirit of the Jesuit ethos: striving for quality, openness and independence of mind, and Christian commitment to the other. With regard to the educational components of an ideological nature, unequivocal agreements shall apply to the institutional organisation, the allocation of means, appointment procedures etc. In relation to research, those research centres or specific research units or projects that are expressions of the broader SJ-project shall be safeguarded through institutional agreements and shall receive adequate staffing and means.

In order to perpetuate the autonomy of the SJ-tradition of the UFSIA-project, a university centre of thought will be established that operates within a Christian ethos, while remaining receptive to input from other-minded individuals. The centre shall assume an autonomous status outside the administrative structure of the University of Antwerp, and with entirely independent funding. Thus it will not need to call on the regular flows of funding for university education or research and will consequently not enter into competition with the University of Antwerp. In order to have any chance of succeeding, the centre must acquire an international dimension that is embedded in international networks of Jesuit universities and centres of research and thought.

The UCSIA mission

The mission of the University Centre Saint Ignatius Antwerp (UCSIA) is defined as follows: *“To provide an international and multidisciplinary forum that supports and stimulates academic reflection, education and service provisions in relation to issues that give expression to the Christian ethos, in order to serve faith on the road to a more just society. The centre must operate in accordance with the Christian ethos and in a spirit of openness and tolerance. It is to be established in co-operation with the Society of Jesus and the members of the university community of Antwerp.”*

The ideological perspective of the centre is explicitly Christian and Catholic, without proselytism or exclusivity. The Centre is open to anyone who, in a spirit of tolerance and openness, respect and dialogue, conducts scientific work on topics that tie in with the Centre's finality. The Centre is borne by the Society of Jesus and the University

Community of Antwerp, so that their many years of successful co-operation within the scope of UFSIA may be perpetuated.

The main mission of the Centre is to provide a high-quality international forum for academic reflection, education and services. The Centre must be embedded in the international network of Jesuit institutions of higher education and research, and it must subscribe to the permanent striving for quality and excellence that is characteristic of these institutions.

The Centre is interdisciplinary in nature and it intends to enhance a fruitful dialogue and exchange between the social and the exact sciences. Its activities are, first and foremost, aimed at supporting and stimulating scientists and scholars who are actively involved in research or teaching on topics that belong to the Centre's sphere of interest. These activities are based on a singular approach that combines vanguard sensibility, state-of-the-art research and effective, creative and proactive strategies. The topics on which the Centre focuses must be characteristic of a "Jesuit university", where service to the faith, intercultural dialogue, dialogue between religions and the striving towards a just society occupy a central position.

The following activities belong to UCSIA's core activities:

- The allocation of grants for long-term visits (sabbatical leave) to researchers of international renown, so that UCSIA and the University of Antwerp would permanently have a minimum number of visiting researchers in various disciplines.
- The organisation of summer courses for young researchers, doctoral students and scientists. Lectures will be presented by prominent scholars.
- The organisation of international conferences.
- The establishment of inter-university and interdisciplinary topic groups under the leadership of one or more scholars of international fame with a view to publications.
- The allocation of grants to promising doctoral students both from the University of Antwerp (with a view to the funding of their studies abroad), and from foreign universities (with a view to the funding of their research at the University of Antwerp).
- The organisation of doctoral colloquiums for young researchers.
- The publication of material that ties in with the objectives of the Centre.

The position of Academic Administrator of the Centre will be entrusted to an internationally renowned scholar from Christian circles.

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