



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
Α.ΔΙ.Π.
 ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ
 ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ
 ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

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 ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT of Spatial & Urban Planning and Regional Development

UNIVERSITY of THESSALY

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Spatial & Urban Planning and Regional Development (DPRD) of the University of Thessaly consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. **Professor Alkis Tsolakis** (Coordinator)
Dean of the LSU College of Art & Design, School of Architecture, Louisiana State University, USA.
2. **Professor Michel Dimou**
UFR Sciences of Economics, Université du Sud Toulon-Var, France.
3. **Professor Panos Prevedouros**
Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, College of Engineering, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Hawaii, USA.
4. **Professor Alex Anas**

Department of Economics, State University of New York at Buffalo, New York, USA.
5. **Mrs. Anna Gianniou**
Vice President of Association of Greek Engineers for Urban & Spatial Planning and Regional Development of the Regional Department of Thessaly, Engineer of Planning and Regional Development, M.Sc., Larisa, Greece.

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

The on site visit started on February 17 and lasted until February 19, 2014. The committee wrote the report upon return to Athens from the 20th the 21st.

The committee met with the president and three vice presidents of the University of Thessaly, the dean of the Polytechnic School, the president of the department, the faculty, the administrative and research support staff. We met formally in the context of group meetings, research units, studio classrooms as well as individually and informally.

The faculty and staff had prepared a rigorous visit program with presentations and discussions. They were flexible in adjusting the program to better accommodate the efficiency of the visit. They were open to discussion and eager to answer questions and show us both the strengths and the weaknesses of the programs.

- List of Reports, documents, other data examined by the Committee.
The internal evaluation report. Additional documentation in PowerPoint presentations.
Other literature produced by the department's research units.
- Groups of teaching and administrative staff and students interviewed
The EEC interviewed all full time faculty, all administrative/research support staff and a representative group of under-graduate, graduate and Ph.D. students.

- Facilities visited by the External Evaluation Committee.

The committee had a thorough tour of the facility, including faculty and administrative offices, classrooms, studios, research units and labs, the main amphitheatre and the public spaces and recreation spaces. The building has been well maintained over the last 13 years.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

- Appropriateness of sources and documentation used

The internal evaluation report was a complete and well documented response to the demands of the ministry. The committee found the report too lengthy and lacking prioritization. It also lacked essential components such as a mission and goals statement, a discussion of strategic planning, and a clear description of the administrative structure and decision making processes of the Department and its institutional context. The committee found the information provided by the faculty during the formal presentations to be a lot more useful in organizing and furthering discussions not only about the past achievements but also about the future of the department.

- Quality and completeness of evidence reviewed and provided.

Please see response above.

- To what extent have the objectives of the internal evaluation process been met by

the Department?

The EEC found that the Department fulfilled the objectives of the external evaluation following the HQA specifications. It would be useful for HQA to revise its specifications towards a more flexible and future/innovation oriented model.

A. Curriculum

The Department of Spatial & Urban Planning and Regional Development, offers an Undergraduate curriculum leading to a diploma of Planning and Regional Development and five postgraduate programmes.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME

APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION

The goals and objectives of the curriculum of undergraduate programme are to cover all thematic units and the plan for achieving them is by providing 54 courses on three basic thematic units (spatial planning, urban planning and regional development). In addition, there are core courses and foreign languages. Total ECTS of undergraduate programme are 300 credits.

The course objectives are decided by the professors who take into account the requirements of society and are consistent to the goals of the curriculum.

The unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum as needed. This procedure happens every two years. In this revised procedure, only professors of the Department and one representative of the students participate. It would be important that a representative of the Association of Greek Engineers for Spatial Planning and Regional Development be included to better represent the requirements of the profession and the labor market.

The structure of the curriculum is rational and coherent. It is divided in two sections. The lower section (1st-4th semester) includes core courses on sociology, computing, geography, math, etc, which are necessary for the upper section (5th-9th semester). Registration in the 5th semester requires completion of at least sixteen of the twenty-one courses of the lower section.

According to the students with whom the EEC held a discussion, the curriculum is viewed positively regarding its thematic range that, although broad, still provides a wide range of flexible skills to assist them in their careers. In addition, the offer of many elective courses (there are 32 offered from which 13 are foreign languages), support the students to personalize their curriculum.

Students say that the program is not evenly distributed during the week and they have large workload some days, because the majority of courses take place in the middle of the week, to accommodate the commuting requirements of some professors.

The program of studies is intensive and rigorous. The Department introduced this year the requirement that each professor should advise 4-5 students from their first year until the end of their studies.

The DPRD has established practical training which lasts two months in order to provide

students with knowledge about the real needs and problems of their area of specialization. The practical training is mandatory and is held at various public or private agencies. EEC's opinion is that this practical training is very helpful for the students.

During the last or 10th semester of studies, students must prepare their diploma thesis. This work is individual or in groups of up to two people. The content and format of the thesis must be professionally prepared and its defense is a major graduation milestone. The EEC was shown a comprehensive list of diploma theses and has the opinion that the subjects are wide reaching and appropriate for the subject matter.

RESULTS AND IMPROVEMENT

The predefined goals are achieved to a satisfactory level. The objectives and goals would be achieved better if courses on urban regeneration and transportation were included in the curriculum. The Department understands the importance of urban regeneration and transportation and they want to expand their coverage in the curriculum. It was mentioned that they have already added lectures on urban regeneration (4th, 9th & 10th semester) and on transportation (in cooperation with the department of civil engineering). It is also important to consider the reintroduction of technical drawing courses and perhaps a support course on land surveying.

In conclusion, the curriculum trains students who are familiar with analytical methodologies and an ability of synthetic approaches to tackle spatial problems and overcome environmental and development challenges.

POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME

APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Department offers five postgraduate programmes:

- In Greek, since 2009: 1. Urban Planning and Spatial Planning and 2. Spatial Analysis and Environmental Management.
- In English, since 2009: 3. European Studies in Regional Development.
- In Greek and French two programmes, since 2005: 4. Population, Development, Foresight (PODEPRO) and since 2004: 5. Spatial Dynamics and Spatial Planning (DYNTAR).

Each graduate programme has 60 ECTS.

During the first semester, it is very positive that all students of the graduate programmes have the opportunity to attend 13 lectures given by scientists from Greece and abroad who conduct lectures on topics related to the objects of the courses of the graduate programme.

Each graduate programme has different goals and objectives but in general we can say that the common goal is to offer a further expertise to each of them and help students who want to improve both their professional skills and research knowledge.

In addition, the admission of students to the postgraduate programmes relies upon several objective criteria such as interview, exams in English, CV, etc. which are applied

competitively.

PH.D. PROGRAMME

APPROACH

There is no set curriculum for the Ph.D. program. All coursework is taken at lower levels and the Ph.D. study is purely focused on research and dissertation preparation and defense.

RESULTS

The Department produces a large number of competent dissertations every year all of which generate scientific publications and presentations. The department has several successful Ph.D. recipients of the program which attest to the quality and timeliness of their research.

IMPROVEMENT

Ph.D. students identified a need for improvement in research methodology instruction. An advanced course on generic research methods should be developed at the Polytechnic School, if not available. Ph.D. students should have more seminars and sessions where they can present their work in public. This provides both exposure and experience at a minimal cost.

When fiscal conditions improve Ph.D. student funding for travel to conferences must be reinstated.

B. Teaching

APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION

Teaching content and delivery

Concerning teaching delivery, the Department uses both lecturing and lab lessons (“studio” lessons). The latter usually take place with more than one professor in the classroom and aims in leading students to apply theoretical knowledge on real life experiences. There are systematic attempts for clustering studio lessons in a single semester in order to combine different theoretical approaches and methodological tools in a single case study. All courses benefit from an e-class platform to provide students with teaching material. Overall, students seem to be very positive about the Department’s teaching delivery.

The Department is well equipped with modern techniques for teaching purposes (every conference room is equipped with a projector that allows for the use of electronic presentations; labs are equipped with specific instruments for urban design sessions). Concerning landscape studies technology, the Department is using recent GIS and CAD software.

All instructors recommend three textbooks for their courses. Textbooks are distributed to students using the Evdoxos system. Moreover, the Department provides a series of working papers, mainly delivered from its members that are available for postgraduate students. The Department’s library has almost 4500 books; this is a rather outstanding feature for a unit of a regional university. Finally the Department is connected to the Greek Universities online data and documents exchange system Pytheas.

The Department tries to bring outside speakers – mainly instructors from other universities and policy makers – to help bridge the gap between the University and the real world. This should be expanded also to people from the business community.

The Department makes an effort to involve undergraduate and postgraduate students in research by presenting their own research in courses, by assigning projects and by using students in their research projects. The Department’s organization in several research units (Εργαστήρια) greatly helps in involving students in research activities. Each lab has high-quality technical staff (half of them have a Ph.D. in Urban Planning or Regional Science, all have a Master degree), so the students can benefit from research assistance, gain valuable experience and have a better appreciation of the purpose and value of research. This procedure should be strongly encouraged and expanded both in terms of the numbers of students involved and in terms of the depth of the involvement.

Relations between faculty and the student body appear to be very good. Faculty members are approachable and the teaching staff is often available for meeting students.

Finally, concerning Ph.D. students, some improvements are required: the students demand methodological seminars and sessions where they can present their work in public. This is an interesting and costless alternative to the participation in conferences, at least for students that begin their Ph.D. research.

Teaching evaluation

The Department has been implementing a comprehensive student evaluation system for several years. The student evaluations of the Department as presented in the internal evaluation report give a very good overall picture of teaching quality, over the last years.

Students and resources

There is a steady increase in the undergraduate student numbers since 2008 but a slight decrease in post-graduate students. In 2012/2013 there were 404 undergraduate students as compared to 338 in 2008/09, which represents a change of 19.5%. During the same period, there is a decrease from 123 to 108 (-12%) for post-graduate students and an increase from 92 to 107 (15%) for Ph.D. students.

The Department's IER reports a student to teacher ratio of 67:1 for 2012-2013. It has increased over the last years as a result of cuts in teaching staff (most particularly in the non-permanent 407/80 teachers category). This ratio is extremely high by any standard (the national average is 26:1 and the EU-27 average is 16:1. This ratio gets extremely high (up to 192:1 in some courses or studios. Student ratios of these levels severely inhibit the learning process. It is important to remind the fact that the Department has made an important effort to hire a high-quality technical and administrative staff, who participate in teaching and student assistance. There are also 2 Assistant Professor and 1 Associate Professor positions available. An early hiring is necessary to insure a continuing high teaching quality within the Department.

Concerning Ph.D. students the ratio of full time professors to students is also quite high (10:1).

Student evaluation

The Department has made important steps towards moving away from the traditional system of evaluating students with a single end-of-year exam. More than half the courses allow students to do a project that typically counts for 50% of the grade. This is an effective way of encouraging student participation and enhancing the learning process.

Although some students find that the amount of work in studios seems sometimes disproportionate compared to the other courses, the Committee strongly supports the Department's decision in favor of multiple and continuous assessments in all courses.

Mobility

The Department has an impressive outward orientation and is well connected with the European research scene. There are many professors or researchers coming from European Universities for short-teaching trips and some Department members have taken a sabbatical for a visiting professor position abroad in previous years.

Concerning the students, the Department offers the possibility to follow three international Masters. Two of them are in French, co-delivered with the Universities of Bordeaux IV and Clermont-Ferrand; the third one is in English. The first two masters train many foreign students, but not the third one. For undergraduate students, both inward and outward mobility is limited, although the Erasmus program allows many opportunities. Between

2008 and 2013, only 38 Greek students went abroad for a teaching semester while 35 foreign students came to Volos. There is a significant scope for expanding student exchanges, since the benefits of student exposure to other cultures, languages and educational systems are immeasurable.

RESULTS AND IMPROVEMENT

Overall, the quality of the Department's teaching seems to be very good. Teaching procedures are appropriate and the EEC's impression is that they are properly implemented. This is corroborated by students who did not identify any major problems in this respect. All Department members are active researchers, which helps keep them informed of developments in their field.

Average time to graduation is about 5 to 6 years. This is a very noteworthy achievement since other Greek faculties and departments feature severe problems with many "eternal students". For Ph.D. students, this is a bit more problematic, since almost 25% of the total Ph.D. student population discontinues the program every year, often because they have found a job or because there is no funding to continue for the Ph.D.

Despite all this, a high number of students are willing to apply to the Ph.D. program in the Department. This is probably due to the high quality of research and the reputation of the Department. Nevertheless, when taking into account the limited human resources and the high rate of attrition, it seems necessary to have a much more selective procedure.

The EEC focused on two issues for improvement:

- The need to strengthen the undergraduate student mobility, especially with the existing Erasmus programmes. The Master in English trains almost exclusively Greek students. Although it is important to deliver English-speaking courses, it may be more appropriate to proceed differently: for example, introduce courses in English in all the Master programs instead of concentrating them in a single one. Another possible issue would be to follow the same rule as the French-speaking Masters and co-deliver this diploma with a foreign English-speaking university.
- The Ph.D. students need some methodological courses and should be able to exchange not only with their supervisor or the researchers of their lab but with all the members of the Department, also among them and with the visiting professors. This is becoming an important issue since the budget for attending research conferences has severely decreased.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase undergraduate student mobility.
- Provide a new organization for the English-speaking Master in order either to train foreign postgraduate students to Volos or to help more Greek postgraduate students to get an international semester abroad.
- Provide a series of seminars and courses for Ph.D. students in order to help them both in methodological issues and in exchanging with other researchers and Ph.D. students.

C. Research

APPROACH (Research policy and main objectives.)

The role and scope of a research program is very important in a department such as this for several reasons:

- 1) By engaging in research the department's faculty maintains its reputation and stature in the relevant academic communities of Greece, Europe and the rest of the world. These relevant academic communities are those of regional science, regional studies, urban economics, city and regional planning, urban design, and environmental planning. The department since its founding has striven hard to develop a strong profile in these fields and a continuing active research program is necessary to maintain its momentum and enhance its position.
- 2) The research projects are important sources of funding to maintain the department's investment in its technical laboratories and the offering of research assistantships to graduate students, at the master's and Ph.D. levels. The projects are therefore important for attracting good students to the department at the postgraduate level.
- 3) Involvement in research projects is a key element in the preparation of the students of the department for professional work. Such projects are, therefore, a complement to the curriculum and play an important role in educating the graduate students.

Currently, the department recognizes the strengths of its achievements, and it should aim to preserve and continue its excellent record in these, despite the pressures of a negative financial situation in Greek universities and a wave of upcoming retirements in the next five years or so in the department.

IMPLEMENTATION (Research promotion and assessment, quality of support and infrastructure.)

The department actively promotes research, the securing of funded research projects and publications. Especially, the senior faculty members that have been involved in the department since its founding are active leaders in promoting quality research efforts.

The EEC was impressed by the culture of research and scientific investigation of issues and problems within the fields of inquiry represented in the department. Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to solving research problems are part of this positive culture in the department.

The dominant fields of inquiry in the department are three: a) city planning and regional spatial planning; b) economic development; c) rural and environmental analysis. A striking positive aspect of the department's organization is that faculty and staff that have primary affiliation with one of these fields of inquiry, work easily across the boundaries and support each other. Thus, it was very visible to the EEC that synergies across the fields happen naturally. This is very important as it broadens the department's capacity to engage in a variety of research projects and to pursue new sources of research funding in an era of diminishing resources from the central administration.

The department has 12 research units with laboratories that support both its teaching and

research mission. These laboratories have been funded internally from the research grants obtained by the department. All together, the presence of these laboratories in the department presents a very positive research infrastructure.

The department's high level of research funding over a long period of time, justifies the maintenance of the personnel of its laboratories as about 50% of these staff members are either Ph.D. graduates or Ph.D. candidates. All have a Masters degree. Those having a Ph.D. degree participate in supporting not only the administration and operation of research infrastructure, and also voluntarily support its teaching mission by engaging in co-teaching or collaborations that support learning outside the classroom.

Recently, the number of students admitted by the department has increased from 70 to 120 students and the average quality of these entering students as measured by their grades has dropped from 17 to 11. This is putting pressure on the department's laboratories to support the department's educational and research missions.

In summary, the department has implemented very well the three objectives mentioned under APPROACH. The faculty's research efforts have been at a high level, the research and teaching missions appear well integrated and mutually supportive of each other, and a positive research culture has been promoted by the department's senior faculty creating an environment in which synergies and collaborations are encouraged and maintained. In addition, all this seems to exist in a highly collegial atmosphere.

RESULTS (Research projects and collaborations, scientific publications and results.)

In its internal evaluation report the department has presented a very detailed accounting of the quantitative aspects of its research enterprise. Therefore, we think that it would be more beneficial if – in this report – we focused on some qualitative aspects for a better understanding of the research efforts in the department.

The department's externally funded research grants can be divided into two categories. The first is the category of academic research projects. These consist primarily of projects and studies of a conceptual, empirical or quantitative analytical nature. Their outputs are suitable for dissemination in printed form and ideally in scientific journals. The second category is applied field studies in which the researchers assess the impacts of or solve real problems on the ground and typically in Greece. These also lead to publications. Both types of research are excellent opportunities for engaging post-graduate students.

In addition, a third type of engagement consists of applied studies in the region of Thessaly. Although these engagements may be viewed as contributions to the local community, they also have value as research projects. The department has not, in the past, marketed these as research efforts, but it probably should.

Any department's research success is measured by national and international recognition. The present department has a relatively high profile in this regard and we can summarize indicators of its success as follows:

a. The department's core research achievements in recent years are:

- In the period 2008-2013, the department has garnered external research projects totalling 7.3 million euros, due to the efforts of its faculty.
- In the last 8 years the department has achieved 260 publications. Some of these

publications appeared in visible international journals such as *Environment and Planning A and C* and *Growth and Change* and the *Journal of Urban Design, Papers of Regional Science*. Notably, publications by the department are accelerating in recent years.

- The department has also published several books which are used as standard textbooks in Greek universities.

b. International distinctions the department or its faculty has achieved in recent years are as follows:

- The department has organized congresses of international organizations. The most notable among these appears to be the annual meetings of the European Regional Science Association (ERSA) in 2006, a proof of the department's recognition as a leader in Greece and an important node in Europe.

Other recent congresses and conferences organized or currently in progress by the department during the lean years of the financial crisis in Greece are:

- (2015 – to be held) 'Property Law and Property Rights' International Conference. Volos.
- (2014 – to be held) 1st International Geomatics Applications 'GEOMAPPLICA Conference'. Skiathos.
- (2013) 1st international Conference on 'Changing Cities'. Skiathos [department's own initiative]
- (2012) 32nd Symposium 'Advances in Geosciences'. Mykonos.]
- (2012) 3rd International Symposium 'Green Chemistry for Environment, Health and Development'.
- (2011) 2nd International Symposium 'Green Chemistry for Environment and Health'.
- (2010) Global Planning Academic Network 3rd World Planning Congress (organizing Committee). Perth, Australia.
- (2010) International Conference 'Spatial Demography of the Balkans trends and challenges'. Budva (Montenegro) [DemoBalk/Association Internationale des Démographes de Langue Française/ Statistical Office of Montenegro]
- (2009), (2011), (2013) 2nd, 3rd, 4th International Conference 'Environmental Management, Engineering, Planning and Economics'. (CEMEPE & SECOTOX Conference). Mykonos, Skiathos, Mykonos islands
- (2009) 3rd International Conference on Environmental Management, Engineering, Planning and Economics (CEMEPE 09) & SECOTOX Conference.
- The department faculty has taken part in numerous international congresses and has been asked to serve as track chairs, session organizers, moderators, discussants, members of organizing or scientific committees, etc.
- The Department was the 2010 - 2013 AESOP representative to the World Planning Congresses Committee and to the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN).
- During the 2014 - 2016 Member of Executive Committee of International Academic Association of Planning, Law and Property Rights (PLPR).
- During 2011 – 2014 Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) of CEMAT.
- During 2007 - 2012 Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP)

Executive Committee & responsibility for AESOP Congresses.

c. Department members have held positions on the editorial boards of non-Greek scientific journals:

1. Urban Studies Research
2. Urban Design International
3. International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning
4. The Open Urban Studies
5. Journal of Urban Design
6. Town Planning Review
7. Regional Science Policy and Practice
8. European Spatial Research and Policy
9. The Open Areas Studies Journal
10. Landscape and Urban Planning
11. Editor of the series "Discussion Papers of the Laboratory of Demographic and Social Analyses"
12. Co-editor of the series "Démographie des Balkans/Balkan Demographic Papers"
13. Revue Geographique des pays mediterraneens (Journal of Mediterranean Geography)

d. Department faculty have been visiting professors or invited for lectures and seminars (some in the frame of ERASMUS agreements), or are members of boards of examiners in other universities

- (2013) Invited by the Universita di Corsica, Laboratory LISA (Lieux, Identités, eSpaces et Activités) (December)
- (2012-2016) External Examiner, University College London (UCL) Bartlett School of Planning, MSc programme on Mega Infrastructure Planning, Appraisal and Delivery (MIPAD)
- (2012) Academic Associate, University of Cambridge, Centre for International Business and Management, Judge Business School
- (2012) Academic Visitor Bartlett School of Planning, University College London (UCL)
- (2011) Invited by INED (French National Institute for Demographic Studies) (September – November)
- (2009) Visiting Professor, Technion University, Haifa, Israel
- (2009) Visiting Professor, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS)
- (2009) Visiting Professor, York University, Toronto, Canada
- (2008) Visiting Professor, Hafen City University Hamburg, School of Urban Planning
- (2006) Visiting Professor, Bucharest, Romania
- (2005) Visiting Professor, LSE University of London, Dept. of Geography & Environment
- (2005) Visiting Professor Univ. Blaise-Pascal Clermont Ferrand
- (2005) Visiting Professor Ecole Nationale du Genie Rural des Eaux et des Forets (ENGREF), Clermont Ferrand
- (2004-2012) Associate Researcher, National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED)
- (2004) Visiting Professor, Victoria University, Australia
- (2000) Academic Visitor, LSE, Department of Geography and Environment
- (2000) Visiting Professor Univ. Francois Rabelais-Tours
- (1998) Nanterre X- Paris, France
- (1998) IAM-Montpellier France
- (1997) Visiting Professor, Remnin Beijing, China
- (1996-1998) Associate Researcher, National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED)

e. Department faculty have been awarded medals, prizes, distinctions, honorary presidencies, ex-officio memberships etc by governments, organizations, or congresses

- (2005) Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques of the French Government [Duquenne, Goussios, Kotzamanis]
- (2012) Distinction for the congress paper at the 3rd Heritage and Sustainable Development International Congress, Porto [Sapounakis]
- (2010) Medal of the Council of Europe- Conférence Européenne des Ministres d' Aménagement du Territoire- CEMAT for the contribution to the promotion of regional Planning, landscape and cultural heritage of Europe [Beriatos]
- (2010) Prize for Excellence in Teaching, granted by the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) [Lalenis, Sapounakis]
- (2011) MOY label of
 - (a) The Masters DYNTAR and PODEPRO programs [Goussios, Kotzamanis, Duquenne]
 - (b) The PhD Programs DYNTAR and PODEPRO [Goussios, Kotzamanis, Duquenne]. Among the 100 co-degree programs of excellence at the European level, 4 were offered to the department.
- (2009) First International Prize for the open international contest for ideas and proposals of the Andreas Papandreou Foundation for the fire-stricken areas of the region of Peloponnese [Kotzamanis, Stathakis and team]
- (2007) Distinction for the excellent study "Protection and Revival of Marathasa" Ministry of Agriculture of the Democracy of Cyprus 'Rural Space Research Unit' [Goussios and team]

f. Journal published by the department

Since 2002, the department publishes the journal *Aeichoros* which specializes in spatial design and development issues and is the only journal of its type in Greece.

g. Laboratory of Demographic and Sociological Analysis

The department houses this laboratory, the only institutionally approved laboratory of its kind in the Greek universities. The lab also supports the e-demography Internet database.

IMPROVEMENT (Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.)

How can the department improve its research profile in a period of limited funding? Especially, how to do so when a number of senior faculty in the Department will be retiring in the next five years or so?

We think that the department has been very successful in fund raising up to now and should be encouraged to continue on its present path by building on its success. This will be the main support for the continuation of its success in advancing its research profile.

We would encourage the department to emphasize quality over quantity in its various research efforts. Improving the quality profile would improve the department's reputation more and its success in research competitions.

Improvement of quality can be achieved in a number of ways:

- 1) Aiming at fewer publications to be submitted to higher ranked journals.
- 2) Seeking collaboration with scholars from other countries who already have a higher reputation than members of the department.

3) When organizing conferences the aim should be to focus on smaller conferences in which every paper session is well-attended and which smaller conferences are designed to have a deeper impact.

Hiring in the department in the near future:

The department faces at least five critical impending retirements in various areas. This will adversely affect the department's research activities unless the retiring faculty is replaced expeditiously. In addition there are four recently vacated faculty lines that need to be replaced but have not yet been authorized. In order to maintain a successful history of research, these positions would have to be allocated wisely and staffed properly.

D. All Other Services

SUPPORT SERVICES

Many processes are still done with extensive use of paper forms including individual student enrolment and manual input of grading sheets. There is an established procedure for the computer based evaluation of courses and summary results can be obtained expeditiously.

Grant management and support from the University is limited and centralized. Investigators and their graduate students appear to be the full preparers of research proposals. This is not a best use for top talent.

Procurement for the purchasing of department, research and lab equipment and other needs is directly connected to the ministry through the Procurement Office of the university. Various restrictions make purchases lengthy and in some cases less competitive.

The department has 12 laboratories which function as effective research units that contribute to research, teaching and service. They work effectively but they will be stressed past their capacity as the number of entrants approaches 120. The building, staffing and facilities are designed for a 40 to 80 range of annual enrolment, so routine admissions past 100 will have serious impacts in quality of education, teaching workload and maintenance of the physical facilities.

Unlike other buildings in Greek universities this one is relatively new (about 12 years of full occupancy) and is quite clean and presentable. It functions well. Budget cuts have created heating and air conditioning problems. Faculty and staff space appears to be adequate but classroom and lab space will become inadequate as very large new entrant classes progress through the years. In five years the Department and building will likely have substantial staffing and space issues.

Unlike other college buildings in Greece, loitering and illegal smoking is minimal in this building.

LIBRARY and IT

The website of the school is informative. Consistent and comprehensive faculty member vitae should be included along with lab descriptions and accomplishments. Both the University and the Department websites should present the many positive aspects of a university experience at University of Thessaly in Volos, a city with substantial local culture, high quality of life and proximity to one of Greece's prime recreational areas, Mount Pelion.

The library is new and expanding with a capable young librarian. A full audiovisual room with two-way sound and picture conferencing is available. Ministry and University support for electronic journals is good with thousands of journal titles being available.

The IT infrastructure of the department is excellent with nearly 100 PCs in the computer and other labs. Some labs operate powerful servers. IT support is inadequate with one full time person being responsible for a very large number of units. Several dozen new PCs have

an approved order and should arrive soon. Hopefully they will include larger monitors.

Support for the timely removal and disposal of obsolete equipment is inadequate. Old equipment is piled and stored in otherwise useful space.

Some mentioned a difficulty in maintaining the license of expensive software and some resort to freeware for some tasks.

SPACE and BUILDINGS

Office space is sufficient. Classroom space is adequate at the present time but will become inadequate with additional enrolment increases. Lab space accommodates Ph.D. students and course instruction, so the lab utilization is continuous and at times heavy. The overall quality and functionality of the building is good.

STUDENT SERVICES and INVOLVEMENT

Students expressed satisfaction with the Department, the building, facilities and education they receive. Most of the complaints centred around financial support from the institution (fellowships, travel grants.) This is an atypical engineering department in terms of gender proportions. Nearly 60% of undergraduates are female and nearly 80% of the post-graduate students are female. There is no correspondence between this student body characteristic, and the faculty and bathroom counts.

The financial crisis has reshaped priorities. Unlike past visits when students complained about the lack of free transport such as a university shuttle, the lack of formal academic advising, and student representation at department meetings, none of these were brought up as current issues.

To an outside evaluator, having three final exam periods lasting three weeks is excessive given that all US universities have one 5-day exam week for each of the two main semesters and a few days of exams for the summer session. This yields a total of about 15 days of final exams at U.S. colleges compared with 45 days of final exams in Greece. The university examination system currently in use in Greece is both costly and unproductive.

OTHER PERSONNEL CATEGORIES

The work duties of several administrative and support personnel are far removed from their expertise. Rigid job descriptions do not allow the department and its activities in curriculum and labs to evolve. Evolution entails the cumbersome issuance of a FEK. Several people in the department identified themselves or others as “a Swiss Army knife.”

It was interesting to observe that the majority of the administrative and support personnel have advanced degrees and are responsible for research programs and partial student research supervision. There are 19 such members averaging over 15 years of experience in the subject department. These members are core support during times of faculty reductions and changes. A common theme for these members is “long hours” and “sacrifice” to get the job done because many do their past duties plus the duties of the lost 407/80 positions.

E. Strategic Planning, Perspectives for Improvement and Dealing with Potential Inhibiting Factors

The Department's short-term goals are to survive the effects of the economic crisis. The Department has four empty full time faculty lines and its adjunct lines have been slashed to zero while at the same time the number of incoming students has almost doubled. Student faculty ratios have been seriously compromised. It is to be noted that even if the open position are filled the gap will not be bridged if there are no more adjunct and full time positions. What is even more serious is the lowering of the entrance standards from 17000 points to 11000 points. The faculty and administrative/research support staff have responded to these challenges with remarkable tenacity, undertaking increasing teaching loads and continuing to pursue research activities with undiminished energy despite diminishing returns.

The following are some key issues the EEC discussed with the Department community. We would strongly encourage the Department to develop these as part of any longer range plan.

1. Maintain and expand interdisciplinarity in both research and teaching
2. Engage and develop the use of cutting edge digital technologies
3. Continue and expand community engagement such as urban regeneration
4. Introduce transportation planning in the curriculum
5. Develop the curriculum to respond to market needs
6. Sustainability, energy usage and environmental impacts need to be covered more explicitly following, for example, United States EPA and EU regulations and requirements
7. Work to assure the professional status of its alumni
8. Expand the activities of the school internationally
9. Maintain the status of research and professional leadership

An additional development that would strengthen the department's attractiveness would be the identification and support of emerging areas such as sustainability, renewable energy and third world nations. Such potential changes should be part of the strategic planning process.

The factors inhibiting strategic planning tasks are the permeating effect of financial and political insecurity and the lack of autonomy in decision-making and implementation. This blocks the way for progress and future planning and is particularly serious since in the next few years seven founding members of the Department will be retiring. It is imperative that the upper administration including the ministry enable the Department to plan its future development and continue to respond to the ever changing and ever more urgent needs for sustainable development. ADIP can be of instrumental assistance in assuring that this very high quality programme continues to set high academic, educational and research standards.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

The DPRD of the University of Thessaly is celebrating its 25 year of operation. It was the first of its kind in the country. It managed to attract and retain faculty with high academic credentials and international experience. It has been a hub of innovation and research and has contributed substantially to regional development through the work of its faculty, staff and alumni. It has had a leadership role in University and School governance and has lent the institution an truly international flavour.

The Department has become an exemplary community of teachers, scholars, researchers and practitioners characterized by a rare sense collegiality-by any standards. The structure of its 12 research units and four studios allows the interweaving of theory and practice, research and teaching and the interaction of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty. The administrative/research support staff are highly qualified and their contribution to every aspect of the Department is substantial. The alumni of the school have gone on to successful careers in government, academia and the private sector in Greece and abroad.

The faculty, staff and Ph.D. students have had a leadership presence in all the international forums and associations. Their published work has commanded critical acclaim. They have been and continue to be pioneers in the internationalization of education in Greece and have successfully established international programs.

They have set and maintained high standards of scholarship and education.

In the past 25 years the Department has demonstrated the ability to develop and adjust to new conditions and challenges with remarkable vision and creativity. The EEC was impressed with the continued enthusiasm, solidarity and commitment of all of the departmental constituents and especially the faculty. It is imperative that the Department proceed with a strategic planning process for the next 25 years starting with defining vision and mission and continuing with clear prioritization of short and long term goals, definition of benchmarks and development of metrics. This should be a planning document worthy of a school of Planning and could become a template for other schools or departments around the country and elsewhere and of great use to ADIP and the Ministry of Education.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
1. Alkis Tsolakis	_____
2. Michel Dimou	_____
3. Panos Prevedouros	_____
4. Alex Anas	_____
5. Anna Gianniou	_____