

REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATOR ON THE NOVA-BOVA SELF-EVALUATION

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Summary of conclusions and recommendations

- 1. The self-evaluation report gives a good insight in the strengths and weaknesses of the NOVA-BOVA network during 2002-2004. The report is accepted at the universities as a valuable document for discussions on the future of the NOVA-BOVA co-operation.*
- 2. It is correct that the report lays in certain aspects greater emphasis at the BOVA side; however, this approach neglects in other areas too much the insight in the development and the ambitions of the NOVA UN..*
- 3. At the strategic level of the BOVA university authorities, an increasing commitment exists for the continuation and strengthening of the cooperation, between BOVA member universities. The commitment is expressed by the rectors and, to some degree, it is shown in institutional strategy documents.*
- 4. There are several positive signs of progress in the development of BOVA University to an equivalent partner. However, there is an urgent need for a strategic plan, including a mission that can serve as a focal point for development. It is advised to involve the university staff and the students in the discussions about the plan.*
- 5. An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the curricula and research programmes of the partner universities is an important instrument to prevent doubles and to stimulate focusing and specialisation.*
- 6. The BOVA universities give priority to a programme of joint master programmes leading to a joint degree. It is advised to downsize the programme at the start to at most three programmes. The initiative needs a system of priority setting to select the most promising programmes.*
- 7. Short BOVA MSc courses are important additions to the network. It is advised to integrate these courses in the regular curriculum of the partner universities.*
- 8. BOVA University needs a fulltime Secretary and at every university a BOVA coordinator with strong connections to the international office. It is essential that they are financed from the university budgets.*
- 9. The future of the NOVA-BOVA co-operation is uncertain. In spite of the successful programmes of the networks clear statements about the future are missing.*
- 10. The future of NOVA-BOVA is fully dependent on the acquirement of external financial support. It has to take advantage of the political priority for Baltic-Nordic co-operation.*

11. To become a likely candidate for such funding it is an urgent priority that the Boards of both BOVA and NOVA express again their full support to the “network of networks” and formulate a clear joint mission and policy document. BOVA has to give priority to its internal organisation and the formulation of its strategy. NOVA has to make clear what its ambitions are towards the co-operation.

12. Some elements of a common strategy are recommended:

- Formulate a common mission which links NOVA-BOVA to the political agenda for the Nordic-Baltic region.*
- Start common research projects directed to regional agricultural and rural development. Apply together for funding.*
- Formulate a programmatic and financial strategy with respect to joint master programmes that are running or under construction.*
- Start a common study on the integration of degree programmes. Joint Master Courses and MSc and PhD courses must be integrated into the curriculum of the universities also with an eye to cost effectiveness. Start the mutual recognition of degrees based on accreditation reports.*
- Stimulate and support teachers that are engaged in mutual activities.*
- Appoint or hire fundraisers with good connections to political and funding agencies. Make use of the “friends of NOVA-BOVA” who are among the original supporters of the network..*

1. Character of the External Evaluation

Tasks of the external evaluation

The evaluation of the cooperation between the Nordic and the Baltic networks of universities in agricultural, forestry and veterinary sciences (NOVA and BOVA) was intended to shed light on the NOVA-BOVA collaboration in 2002-2004 and its current status as well as to provide directions for future development. The evaluation was mainly targeted for internal use and therefore had the form of a self-evaluation. Seeking to get in addition an objective picture, the organisers asked an independent expert from outside the networks to externally evaluate the self-evaluation process and the conclusions and recommendations that were formulated in the self-evaluation report. The Guidelines for Evaluation formulated the expectations as follows: *“it is expected that, based on the report and other relevant materials, the external evaluator will provide recommendations on how the organisation could be developed in the coming years”*.

Structure of the external evaluation

The external evaluation is partly based on the self-evaluation report and other relevant written sources like agreements between universities, action plans, strategy reports and protocols of meetings during 2002-2004 and information on the NOVA-BOVA Working Seminar held in October 2004 as published on the BOVA website; and partly on the impressions and information that was gathered during meetings and talks in the period of December 13 till 17, 2004, at the NOVA office, the four Baltic universities and KVL. (See annex for the evaluation schedule and the persons that were interviewed).

Structure of this report

This report will concentrate on the following items:

- A critical review of the self-evaluation process: the objectives, the organisation, the report, the strong and the weak points.
- An analysis of the present state of the NOVA-BOVA co-operation.
- The formulation of conclusions and recommendations on the mission, the strategy and the organisation of NOVA-BOVA and of the two partnering networks.

It is assumed that the reader of this report is familiar with the self-evaluation report.

2. The self-evaluation

2.1. The methodology of the self-evaluation

The evaluation has been carried out as a case study. It was organised by a team consisting of the five officers who are responsible for either NOVA-UN, BOVA and/or NOVA-BOVA. The team composed a self-evaluation report that was partly based on written sources and partly on a survey among a number of key players in the networks

(BOVA rectors, members of the N-B Coordination Committee, BOVA coordinators and representatives of N-B academic networks). Unfortunately, the rectors of the NOVA universities were not involved in the evaluation.

The survey received a good response: 31 out of 38 addressees responded to the questionnaire. Collection of the questionnaires was followed by interviews with respondents. Later on also a sample of Baltic PhD students who attended NOVA PhD courses were interviewed. The results were discussed during a NOVA-BOVA Working Seminar held at Parna, Estonia, 28-29 October, 2004.

2.2. The challenges of the evaluation.

The need for the self-evaluation was strongly determined by the actual institutional context of the collaboration. The self-evaluation report explicitly mentions:

- *“The adoption of a strategy for the NOVA University for 2004-2006;*
- *The finalisation of funding by the K&A Wallenberg foundation at the end of 2004;*
- *The need to strengthen the organisational development and funding of the BOVA University”.*

In particular for the latter purpose the evaluation laid *“a greater emphasis on the BOVA University than on the NOVA UN”.*

The list of subjects that had to be scrutinised (see the Guidelines for Evaluation) contains two issues that concentrate mainly on progress in the organisation and the programme and one issue with a broader and more strategic scope:

- 1. The examination of tasks, routines and performances of relevant institutional structures including Boards, NOVA-BOVA CC, secretariats, university coordinators, ad hoc working groups and university administrations.*
- 2. The assessment of the NOVA-BOVA activities during 2002-2004*
- 3. To clarify the role that NOVA UN, BOVA and their member universities assign to NOVA-BOVA co-operation and to determine the true level of ambition by relevant stakeholders.*

2.3. Conclusions of the self-evaluation.

The main conclusion of the self-evaluation report is that the development in 2002-2004 of the co-operation was very successful.

The report is satisfied about the establishment of viable administrative capacities on the BOVA side. It mentions in particular the establishment and functioning of the BOVA secretariat and the 0.5 position of the NOVA-BOVA coordinator. I add to that list the very important activities of the local BOVA coordinators. There is no doubt that through all these officers BOVA University is becoming more and more a reality.

The report is also positive about programmatic aspects of the NOVA-BOVA co-operation. It concludes that a number of activities were successfully developed. It mentions in particular the successful revitalisation of the short NOVA-BOVA courses, the initiation of joint MSc programmes and the participation of 50 Baltic PhD students in NOVA PhD courses. I learned that at least the joint master programme on forestry is running well. The situation with the joint master in Economics and Agribusiness is less

favourable because the Norwegian partners withdrew their support thus making the programme largely a pure Latvian programme.

The self-evaluation also concludes that well functioning routines for planning and coordination have been established during 2002-2004. Significant external funds have been raised to develop the co-operation.

The report mentions a number of issues that still need improvement. Among them are the absence of internal funds on the BOVA side, the lack of a strategy of the BOVA University and the salient disparity in the institutional set-up at NOVA and BOVA.

2.4. Reactions to the report, strengths and weaknesses

I noticed during the interviews at the different BOVA entities and at KVL a general acceptance of the evaluation report. The organisers deserve a compliment for the quality of the report and for the procedure that was followed. The self-evaluation report will certainly play a major role in the decisions that have to be made on the future of the collaboration.

Nevertheless I need to make a number of critical remarks about the applied methodology and the conclusions of the report.

My first remark is on the deliberate choice to give “*greater emphasis on the BOVA side*”. It is indeed true that the organisation and funding of NOVA UN is more advanced than that of BOVA University. Since the Wallenberg funding was intended to strengthen the BOVA structure and organisation it is correct that the organisational development of BOVA got a lot of attention.

Unfortunately, the evaluation concentrated also with the other issues strongly on the BOVA side. As a consequence the self-evaluation does not cover the development of the NOVA UN and its ambitions towards NOVA-BOVA. This weakness is not compensated by the recently formulated and accepted new strategy of NOVA-UN. The document clearly describes the NOVA strategy for 2004-2006, but it is almost silent on NOVA-BOVA.

My second remark is that the self-evaluation failed to determine the “*true level of ambition*” of **all** the relevant stakeholders. In particular the opinions of the NOVA university rectors are missing. In general, the report concludes that the lack of institutional and personal commitment is a severe problem at all the member institutions, and is reinforced by a lack of motivation tools to engage people. The co-operation is not anchored at the home universities.

3. The present position of NOVA-BOVA

The NOVA-BOVA co-operation is at the doorstep of a third stage in its existence. It started in the mid nineties of the previous century as an initiative from the Nordic Universities. They noticed that the universities in the recently independent Baltic countries needed assistance in the process of modernisation. The first stage therefore had the character of development co-operation. The NOVABA programme of short MSc courses taught by Nordic teachers in the Baltic universities was very successful. It was positively evaluated in 1999 by Dr. Lauri Kettunen from Finland.

BOVA University started in 1996 as a counter part on the Baltic side. The first agreement on co-operation was signed in 1999. It was agreed that the four universities should co-operate in for instance the

- Exchange of students and teachers via the European Exchange programmes
- The development of joint courses and study programmes
- The introduction of joint research and development projects.

In 2001 the co-operation faced an almost complete standstill. Lack of funding and of an infrastructure for co-operation were the main obstacles for further development. Fortunately development could continue in a second stage during 2002-2004 due to a grant from the K&A Wallenberg foundation as mentioned before.

In spite of this successful period, the self-evaluation report is critical about the present status of NOVA-BOVA. It mainly sees obstacles at the BOVA side. The reports conclude that *“a necessary condition for a successful long-term development is that the member universities have a common vision and strategy. On the NOVA side, a significant progress was achieved in 2004 by adopting the NOVA UN strategy. The BOVA University has neither an approved strategy, nor are its objectives reflected in the strategies of member universities”*. The report also describes the *“absence of internal funds on the BOVA side as a major threat for co-operation between NOVA and BOVA”*. Lastly it observed *“a salient disparity in the institutional set-up at NOVA and BOVA”*.

In my opinion the report is again a bit too one-sided; it overlooks the obstacles that also exist within the NOVA UN. I will return to that in chapter 5.

With respect to the BOVA University I observed during my evaluation that the situation is changing. I will describe the developments of the BOVA University in the framework of the NOVA-BOVA network in the next chapter.

4. The development of BOVA University

4.1. The present position

Recently, the rectors of the four Baltic partners set an important step forward in the development of the BOVA University when they signed a new agreement: *“Agreement on Co-operation in the field of Joint BOVA study programmes”*. They reconfirmed several of the areas of co-operation from an earlier (1999) agreement and in addition concentrated the strategy of their network for the coming years strongly on the *“elaboration and implementation of joint Master and Doctoral programmes”*.

During my discussions with the rectors I got impressed by their strong will to make BOVA University a success. They expect an improvement in the external conditions now the Baltic States recently joined the European Union. The first EU support for a joint Master programme has been received already.

It is also important that the rectors decided to finance the BOVA secretariat from their own budgets, an indispensable element of the building up of the network. They will also appoint Vice-Rectors of Studies or Academic Affairs in a newly established “BOVA Committee for Joint Studies”.

In short, there are several positive signs or progress in the development of BOVA University. However, planning and strategy are still a weak point. At the moment most initiatives have an *ad hoc* character. To stimulate the future position of BOVA University I will formulate some recommendations for the development of a strategic plan.

4.2. A Strategic Plan for BOVA University

The Strategic Plan for BOVA University has to be a clear focal point for the future. Essential elements of a strategic plan are

- A mission
- An analysis of strengths and weaknesses
- A programme for education and research
- An organisational plan.

The attention in the BOVA organisation has been concentrated so far mainly on the latter elements, thereby neglecting the first two elements.

The value of a strategic plan depends very much on the way the organisation has been involved in its formulation. A plan that is a descent from the top of an organisation is often hardly effective. On the contrary, a strategic plan that is discussed before acceptance in the partner institutions at the level of staff and students has a much bigger chance to become a focal point for future development.

I strongly recommend that a first draft of a strategic plan will be discussed with the different stakeholders in the universities (management, staff and students) before its final formulation and acceptance.

4.3. The Mission

A starting point for every strategic discussion is the formulation of a Mission which describes the objectives and the challenges of the network, in relation to both the needs of society and the developments in the related sciences. The present evaluation reports might be helpful in such a discussion.

The link to society is certainly of great importance for universities in the field of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine, because their functions and their future are closely linked to the development of agriculture and forestry in their national and international environment. It is obvious that these sectors of society are in rapid change. Primary agricultural production is no longer the main focal point, the attention shifts to areas like sustainability, rural development, nature conservation, and food quality and safety. The BOVA Mission has to define the functions of their scientific activities for these developments in modern society. A search on the internet sites of other European universities in this field will provide several good examples of such missions.

The scientific fields that are covered by the four universities are in a process of quick differentiation. Society asks more often for interdisciplinary approaches and there is a stronger dependency on basic sciences to stay in touch with modern technologies. As a consequence the universities have to diversify their curricula and their research programmes. All these changes ask a greater flexibility of the universities and large

investments. They often lack sufficient critical mass and resources to follow this development on their own. Co-operation is the optimal answer to these challenges.

4.4. An Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses

An effective BOVA strategy for co-operation has to be based on a thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the curricula and research programmes of the partner universities. The results of such an analysis will help to prevent doubles and to stimulate focusing and specialisation.

The description of weaknesses is often the most difficult part of the development of a strategy. An external review can be of great help. In the case of BOVA University national sensitivities might also interfere with such decisions. The process of prioritising will only be accepted when the universities and the politicians recognise that the four universities together are much stronger than each one on its own, certainly in international perspective.

4.5. A Programme for Education and research

Short MSc courses.

Short MSc courses have been the most successful elements of NOVA-BOVA. It is important that there are attempts to develop these courses also within the BOVA co-operation. The organisation of such courses in the BOVA framework is certainly less expensive than the NOVA-BOVA courses. They can be an important stepping stone for the development of full Master programmes and to research co-operation.

Joint Master programmes leading to joint degrees

The recent Agreement between the BOVA member universities gives the highest priority to the development of joint master programmes leading to joint degrees. This choice was supported by the respondents to the survey; on average this activity got the highest priority.

The universities are aware that the choice for this priority is not an easy one. The Agreement stipulates that the deliverance of joint degrees might have to wait on the adjustment of the national legislations. I recommend not to wait till legislation is adjusted. Temporarily the accreditation of a joint programme might be limited to one country, but the curriculum can still be a joint activity.

Apart from the joint degree there are also other pitfalls. Funding is one of the toughest ones. BOVA can learn in this respect from their Nordic colleagues who struggle already for a considerable period of time with the organisation of joint Master programmes.

My recommendation is to continue with this plan but to downsize it at the start. The agreement mentions six starting areas. That seems too much. The more so because also some joint NOVA-BOVA Master programmes are under construction or running. It seems better to concentrate the first efforts on a maximum of three or better two programmes. A system of priority setting has to be developed using criteria such as:

- Financial support
- Linkage to a network
- Scientific and educational quality
- Relations to society

The proposal *Management of Biodiversity and Multifunctional landscapes* deserves such a priority because it received a considerable financial support from the SOCRATES programme.

Research co-operation has been mentioned in both the 1999 and the 2004 agreement as a priority. I have not seen any clear indication of such co-operation among the BOVA partners. In my opinion it is a prerequisite for the development of joint doctoral schools and joint PhD training courses. It is often a stronger stimulus for scientists to work together than joint education programmes.

4.6. The organisation

An organisation like the BOVA University needs a strong central secretariat. It is a positive move that the BOVA rectors have decided to finance the secretariat from begin 2005 from their own budgets.

The international offices and in particular the BOVA coordinator is in each university the central officer for the development of BOVA. I recommend to support these services to the maximum. They are the heart and soul of the organisation.

5. The Future of NOVA-BOVA

Undoubtedly the NOVA-BOVA network has been successful during the two previous stages. At the end of the NOVABA programmes of short Master courses the external evaluator concluded that the programme has been successful and thus should be continued and expanded. (Unfortunately most of his suggestions for improvement were not implemented). As mentioned before (paragraph 2.4) also the present self-evaluation concludes that the development of the network has been very successful during 2002-2004.

At the beginning of 2005 nothing has been decided about the future of the NOVA-BOVA co-operation. Also the self-evaluation report does not formulate any view on the future. It expects that such wisdom will be provided by the external evaluator. I will try to meet these expectations. In doing so I will first analyse the present situation and then formulate some suggestions for future development.

5.1 The ambitions

The central question is “*Are the two networks still interested in the network of networks NOVA-BOVA?*”.

The self-evaluation report concludes that at the strategic level of the BOVA university authorities, an increasing commitment exists for the continuation and strengthening of the co-operation, both between BOVA member universities and between BOVA and NOVA. The commitment is expressed by rectors and, to some degree, it is shown in institutional strategy documents.

When it comes to the operative level, the commitment of department/faculty leaders appears to be very low. During the interviews some respondents indicated that the co-operation between BOVA and NOVA is still more focused on getting help from NOVA

partners, e.g. to increase teaching competence or to make joint courses more attractive, rather than becoming equal partners in c-operation.

With respect to the Nordic universities it is evident that also during the second phase of the network the NOVA side has been very important in raising external funds, delivering high quality teaching in MSc courses for the Baltic students, and opening up the NOVA PhD courses for the Baltic students. Many enthusiastic administrators and teachers have spent a lot of time and effort to stimulate the co-operation.

Unfortunately I am a little hampered in forming an opinion about the present ambitions of the authorities of the Nordic universities on the co-operation. They were under-represented and under-exposed in the self-evaluation and in the external evaluation. However, the newly accepted NOVA Strategic Plan is of some assistance. It mentions that *“in recent years, all NOVA universities have been subject to financial cutbacks and declining student recruitment to certain programmes”*. It also reports that *“Thus far, the network has not been afforded the full acceptance, status and recognition that it needs within the NOVA member universities”*.

My impression is that the Nordic Universities have their hands full with NOVA and cannot afford to spend any capacity on NOVA-BOVA co-operation. This might explain why teachers from Nordic universities are not offered any additional salaries for lecturing at NOVA-BOVA Master courses or for participating in any other NOVA-BOVA activity. It is reported that the interest of the Nordic teachers for an engagement without additional salary is declining.

From both sides a clear statement is missing about their ambitions for the future of NOVA-BOVA. It seems that each side is waiting for the other side.

5.2. Conclusions and recommendations for NOVA-BOVA.

Funding

The future of the NOVA-BOVA co-operation is fully dependent on the acquirement of external financial support.

In 2002-2004 fundraising activities have been successful. The report mentions a support from Nordic sources of € 675,500 and from EU Socrates of € 233,000.

I was informed that also in the near future Baltic co-operation is a political priority of the Nordic Council of Ministers and of some national funding agencies. Also EU support is closer at reach for the new member states.

Is the present NOVA-BOVA network a likely candidate for such funding? Basically it is, but improvements are strongly recommended. It is an urgent priority that the Boards of both BOVA and NOVA express again their full support to the “network of networks” and formulate a clear joint mission and policy document. BOVA has to give priority to its internal organisation and the formulation of its strategy. NOVA has to make clear what its ambitions are towards the co-operation.

Elements of a common strategy

- Formulate a common mission which links NOVA-BOVA to the political agenda for the Nordic-Baltic region.
- Start common research projects directed to regional agricultural and rural development. Apply together for funding.

- Formulate a programmatic and financial strategy with respect to joint master programmes that are running or under construction.
- Start a common study on the integration of degree programmes. Joint Master Courses and MSc and PhD courses must be integrated into the curriculum of the universities also with an eye to cost effectiveness. Start the mutual recognition of degrees based on accreditation reports.
- Stimulate and support teachers and working groups that are engaged in mutual activities.
- Appoint or hire fundraisers with good connections to political and funding agencies. Make use of the “friends of NOVA-BOVA” who are among the original supporters of the network.

Annex

List of persons interviewed by the external evaluator in December 2004

Dec 13, Monday, NOVA secretariat, Alnarp

Paul Jensén, Prof., NOVA Rector
Knut Wålstedt, Assoc. Prof., NOVA coordinator
Vilis Brukas, Dr., NOVA-BOVA coordinator

Dec 14, Tuesday, Estonian Agricultural University (EAU), Tartu

Alar Karis, Prof., Rector of EAU
Hardi Tullus, Prof., Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs
Aret Vooremae, Dr., Head of the International Department, NOVA-BOVA CC member
Kylli Korgesaar, International relations officer, BOVA coordinator at EAU
Lea Michelson, Academic Secretary at EAU, leader of NOVA-BOVA Working group on Joint MSc programmes
Ulle Jaakma, Assoc. Prof., leader of N-B network in Veterinary Medicine
Mati Roasto, Assoc. Prof., Representative of N-B network in Food Hygiene and Safety

Dec 15, Wednesday, Latvia University of Agriculture (LLU), Jelgava

Juris Skujans, Prof., Rector of LLU
Henn Tuherm, Prof., NOVA-BOVA CC member
Ruta Zaleckite, Coordinator of MSc studies at LLU, BOVA coordinator
Ina Alsiņa, Assoc.prof., Teacher at NOVA-BOVA MSc courses
Irina Arhipova, Prof. Leader of the network in Bioinformatics
Liga Paura, Prof. assist., Representative of the network in bioinformatics
Gints Birzietis, Prof., Representative of the network in Agricultural Engineering
Imants Ziemelis, Prof., Representative of the network in Agricultural Engineering
Māra Urtane, Assoc.prof., Representative of the BioLandMan network
Aivars Berziņš, Dr., Representative of the network in Food Hygiene

Dec 16, Thursday, Kaunas:

Lithuanian University of Agriculture (LZUU)

Minvydas Liegus, Head of the International Department, BOVA coordinator at LZUU
Steponas Raudonius, Assoc. Prof., Coordinator of MSc programme at LZUU, member of the NOVA-BOVA Working Group on Joint MSc programmes
Anzelika Raskauskiene, Dr., Leader of N-B network in Agroecology
Edmundas Petrauskas, Assoc. Prof., Representative of N-B network in forestry

Vitas Marozas, Assoc. Prof., Representative of N-B network in Biodiversity
Kestutis Navickas, Assoc. Prof., Teacher from a NOVA-BOVA MSc courses
Students that took part in NOVA PhD and NOVA-BOVA MSc courses

Lithuanian Veterinary Academy (LVA)

Raimundas Mockeliunas, Prof., Vice-Rector for Development
Violeta Saladiene, Head of the International Department, BOVA coordinator at LVA
Mindaugas Šarkūnas, Dr., Representative of N-B network in Veterinary Medicine
Aloyzas Januškauskas, Dr., Representative of N-B network in Veterinary Medicine
Dalia Garalevičienė, Dr., Teacher of a NOVA-BOVA MSc course
Students that participated in NOVA PhD and NOVA-BOVA MSc courses

Bova secretariat

Alvidas Sarlauskas, Dr., BOVA secretary
Anzelika Raskauskiene, Dr., BOVA secretary assistant

Vilnius, Hotel Adelita

Henrikas Zilinskas, Prof., Rector of LVA, BOVA Rector
Romualdas Deltuvas, Prof., Rector of LZUU

***Dec 17, Friday, The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL),
Copenhagen***

Per Holten Andersen, Assoc.Prof., Rector of KVL
Flemming Frandsen, Prof., Vice Rector for Education
Christian Kapel, Prof., Member of NOVA-BOVA CC
Poul Einer Hansen, Assoc. Prof., Member of NOVA-BOVA CC until Dec. 31'st, 2004
Lennart Prage, Member of NOVA-BOVA CC representing the Swedish University of
Agricultural Sciences
Paul Jensen, Prof., NOVA Rector
Knut Wålstedt, Assoc. Prof., NOVA-BOVA coordinator

