

## Between Teaching and Research: Challenges of the Academic Profession in Croatia

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≈ Discussions about synergy or independence of teaching and research are present in many studies (Bilić, 2009; Brew & Boud, 1995; Enders & Teichler, 1997; Griffiths, 2004; Jakovljević, 2010; Jenkins, 2000; Ramsden & Moses, 1992). Humboldt's model introduced synergy between teaching and research, thus highlighting the importance of originality in scientific work and of the dissemination of the knowledge stemming from it. The synergy between teaching and research is also referenced in the education policy of the European Union, with the Berlin Communiqué (2003) introducing a request for the promotion of better synergy between European educational and research areas. However, studies reveal a different understanding of the teaching-research relationship between those who advocate their synergy (Brew & Boud, 1995; Jenkins, 2000; Neumann, 1993) and those who advocate their mutual independence (Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Ramsden & Moses, 1992).

Examining different perspectives of the teaching-research relationship, the research presented in this paper focused on understanding how academics see their dominant roles. Its objective was to examine how academics perceive their roles as teachers and researchers. A qualitative approach was used, with data being collected using a standardised semi-structured interview. A total of 60 interviewees participated in the research, all academics from Croatia. The results revealed that the research participants see themselves most frequently as teachers, then as teachers and researchers, and least frequently as predominantly researchers. Their identification is mainly determined by external factors, most frequently negatively connoted, which presents a challenge within the context of job satisfaction. Such results also point to legal, material, personnel and administrative difficulties in the Croatian higher education system.

**Keywords:** the academic profession, research, the teacher/researcher dichotomy, teaching

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## Med poučevanjem in raziskovanjem: izzivi akademskega poklica na Hrvaškem

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~ V veliko raziskavah so predstavljene diskusije o sinergiji ali neodvisnosti poučevanja in raziskovanja (Ramsden & Moses, 1992; Brew & Boud, 1995; Enders & Teichler, 1997; Jenkins, 2000; Griffiths, 2004; Bilić, 2009; Jakovljević, 2010). Humbolt je s poudarjanjem pomembnosti izvirnosti znanstvenega dela in diseminacije znanja, ki iz tega izhaja, uvedel sinergijski model med poučevanjem in raziskovanjem. V Berlinskem komunikeju (2003) je bila predstavljena ideja o promociji boljše sinergije med evropskim izobraževanjem in raziskovanjem, kar je sinergijo med poučevanjem in raziskovanjem umestilo v edukacijske politike Evropske unije. Študije pa kažejo na različno razumevanje povezovanja med poučevanjem in raziskovanjem tistih, ki sinergijo zagovarjajo (Neumann, 1993; Brew & Boud, 1995; Jenkins, 2000), in tistih, ki poudarjajo njuno medsebojno neodvisnost (Ramsden & Moses, 1992; Hattie & Marsh, 1996). S preučevanjem različnih vidikov odnosa med poučevanjem in raziskovanjem smo se v tej raziskavi osredinili na to, kako akademiki vidijo svojo primarno vlogo. Namen je bil ugotoviti, kako zaznavajo svojo vlogo kot učitelji in raziskovalci. Uporabljen je bil kvalitativni pristop, podatki pa so bili zbrani s pomočjo standardiziranega polstrukturiranega intervjuja. Sodelovalo je 60 intervjuvancev, akademikov iz Hrvaške. Izsledki kažejo, da se udeleženci raziskovalci najpogosteje vidijo kot učitelji, manj pogosto kot učitelji in raziskovalci, najmanj pogosto pa primarno kot raziskovalci. Njihova identifikacija je večinoma determinirana z zunanjimi dejavniki, najpogosteje z negativno konotacijo, kar predstavlja izziv v kontekstu zadovoljstva na delovnem mestu. Ti izsledki kažejo tudi na pravne, materialne, osebne in na administrativne težave v hrvaškem visokošolskem sistemu.

**Ključne besede:** akademski poklic, raziskovanje, dvojnost učitelj – raziskovalec, poučevanje

## Introduction

Teaching and research are traditionally regarded as fundamental academic activities, while also being viewed as the most important aspects in the academic system of career advancement. Both activities, their synergy and independence, are the focus of many studies (Bess, 1998; Braxton, 1993; Brew, 2006; Colbeck, 1998; Diamond & Adam, 1997; Geiger, 1993; Greenbank, 2006; Kogan & Teichler, 2007; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Locke & Teichler, 2007; Neumann, 1992; Ramsden & Moses, 1992; Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000). The research results in this field point to the existence of a different understanding by those who support a close synergy between these two activities and those who advocate their independence. Ramsden and Moses (1992) indicated three possible conceptualisations of this relationship: completely integrated, which is based on the understanding that one needs to be an active researcher if one is to be a good university teacher; partly integrated, which is based on the understanding that research work and teaching need to be interrelated, not on an individual level, but on an institutional level (division/department); and independent, which is based on the understanding that there is a causal relationship between the two activities, but that they are mutually independent.

Similarly to the aforementioned authors, in a meta-analysis including 58 different research studies examining the relationship between teaching and research at universities, Hattie and Marsh (1996) speak of negative, positive and neutral relationships.

Discussing the negative relationship, Hattie and Marsh (1996) point out that academics who are more productive in research, who invest more time and energy in research activities, at the same time pay less attention to teaching and teaching activities, which leads to the negative correlation between time and energy invested in teaching and research. Within the context of their discussion on choosing between the academic activities of teaching or research, the authors point out that the teaching role, unlike the research role, is primary for most academics. In order to validate this claim, they refer to the results of research (Mooney, 1991, in Hattie & Marsh, 1996) conducted on a sample of 35,000 respondents from 382 universities, which reveals that 98% of the respondents judged that being a good teacher is the key element of academic activity, while 59% said the same of research. Discussions of the positive relationship are based on studies (Borgatta, 1970; Deming, 1972; Ferber, 1974; Halsey, 1992, in Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Jencks & Riesman, 1968; White, 1986) that argue that a positive correlation between teaching and research is evident and unambiguous, and that it is impossible to speak about the independence of these

two activities. Most of the academics who participated in these studies (Halsey, 1992, in Hattie & Marsh, 1996) claimed that one needs to be active in research in order to be a good university teacher. Jauch (1976, in Hattie & Marsh, 1996) offers research results showing that 91% of academics believe that research activity increases teaching efficiency, and that such activities are inseparable in academic discourse.

Discussions of the neutral relationship argue that research and teaching are two completely different academic activities, and that it is impossible to speak about their positive or negative correlations. Moreover, Rushton, Murray and Paunonen (1983, in Hattie & Marsh, 1996) revealed that the personality traits of teachers and researchers are orthogonal. Their research showed that researchers are more ambitious, resilient and dominant, demonstrate leadership skills and are more aggressive and independent, whereas teachers are more liberal and social, demonstrate leadership skills, and are extroverted, patient, objective, supportive and less authoritative.

Based on the results of their research, which revealed the dominance of negatively and neutrally correlated relationships, Hattie and Marsh (1996) conclude that belief in an inseparable relationship between teaching and research is a longstanding myth in the academic community, and that in the best case scenario there is only a weak connection between these two segments of academic activity.

Following the discussion of the previously elaborated authors, Kuh and Hu (2001) offer the results of their research on the relationship between research and teaching and confirm the conclusions of Hattie and Marsh (1996). However, the discussion by these authors was conducted within the context of research universities and is therefore strongly in favour of one segment of academic activities: the research segment. Teichler, Arimoto and Cummings (2013) point out that recent works on changes in higher education increasingly contain discussions about the strong research orientation of universities worldwide. The authors claim that research universities are therefore becoming more present in the international arena of higher education, and are thus pushing teaching activity aside.

Brew (2006), however, claims that the conclusions of Hattie and Marsh (1996) were subsequently rejected, as many later studies verified the necessary synergy of the two fundamental academic activities. He places teaching and research in a wider context that includes students as active participants in the teaching process and users of research results, the social environment in which students implement the new insights they have gained based on the research results transferred in the teaching process, and, in the long-run, the sustainability

of the community that is based on the research results acquired and/or learned through the teaching process. Enders (1999) mentions the conglomerate of teaching and research activities at universities, which are interlinked and form an inseparable whole. Cummings (2009, p. 39) also perceives teaching and research as “fundamental and inseparable activities of the academic life,” while Taylor (2010), identifying one of the indicators of the crises of university and higher education in the US, expresses his concern with the escalation of a research orientation at American universities, which is why teaching and the education of students are being neglected. Gray (2012, p. 41) regards teaching and research as inseparable activities at universities, concluding that the “fundamental idea of every university is the quest and dissemination of knowledge; knowledge that stems from research results and is transferred to students in the teaching process”.

Although various discussions exist about the relationship between teaching and research, it is evident that European educational policies establish the direction of their development on the basis of the inseparability and integrity of these two activities. Advocating a synthesis of knowledge and teaching as well as their functional synergy is one of the most important characteristics of the knowledge society concept that is one of the fundamental concepts of the Bologna Process. One of the basic principles mentioned in the *Magna Charta Universitatum* is that “Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge” (*Magna Charta Universitatum*, 1988, p. 2). The Bologna Declaration on the European Space for Higher Education (1999) confirmed the principles of the *Magna Charta*, while the Bologna Declaration (2003) defined the synergy between European educational and research areas even more strongly (EHEA & ERA). Furthermore, in its document *Preparing Europe for a New Renaissance: a Strategic View of the European Research Area* (2009), the European Commission additionally strengthened efforts aimed at developing research and the subsequent generation of knowledge through the teaching process. Based on all of this, it is possible to conclude that universities perceive themselves as bearers of two inseparable activities: research (the creation of new knowledge) and education (teaching).

Apart from the teaching and research roles of academics, in the past two decades a significant number of discussions have appeared regarding their third role, arising from the third mission of universities: the role of community engagement (Boyer, 1990; Checkoway, 2001; Čulum & Ledić, 2010; Ledić, 2007; Macfarlane, 2005). These authors follow the work of Ernest Boyer and his idea of scholarship of service (Boyer, 1990), as well as his later idea of scholarship of engagement (Boyer, 1996), and advocate the need to develop a wider view of

the contribution of university teachers and higher education to society. Such an approach advocates changing the traditional patterns of teaching and research with a stronger integration of community engagement in academic activities, in order for them to have a recognisable character of synergy with the community and society, as well as with perceived needs and problems. Macfarlane (2007) also contributed to discussions about the roles of university teachers in the context of public and active participation in society, claiming that the ideal university teacher and academic citizen acts through three components of the academic profession: political literacy, social and moral responsibility, and community engagement.

Apart from these roles, there are various other additional (new) roles required of academics, which are expected to become an integral part of their everyday duties: project preparation and management, collecting research funds, application of new teaching methods, etc. Čizmić, Crnkić and Softić (2013) claim that teachers and associates, as leading implementers of activities within universities, should have new competences and implement various activities, including recognising and using new opportunities, taking initiative, an innovative approach to business activities, understanding new processes and concepts, effective networking, and a number of other competences connected with the new organisational context.

The challenges of the teaching-research relationship have also been the subject of several studies conducted in Croatia (Kovač, 2001; Kovač, Ledić, & Rafajac, 1999; Ledić, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994). Within this context, it is important to mention Croatia's participation in the project *The Changing Academic Profession (CAP)*, which commenced in 2009 (Rončević & Rafajac, 2010).<sup>3</sup> As a result of this project, Croatian findings on changes in the academic profession have become comparable with those on an international level.

As in the CAP research (Höhle & Teichler, 2013), respondents in Croatia, according to Rončević and Rafajac (2010), expressed a relatively high level of satisfaction with their profession and a pronounced feeling of belonging to their discipline, institution and department. On average, their total weekly and teaching load correlates with those in other countries, while their evaluation of the quality of resources and working conditions is near the average in other countries. An analysis of the results in terms of attitudes regarding teaching

3 The research, which examined attitudes of university professors regarding changes in the academic profession, was conducted using an online survey questionnaire (a partly changed and adapted CAP questionnaire, which still allowed comparative analysis) on a representative sample of 354 university teachers of all academic titles from all Croatian public universities. The objectives of this research were defined as a group of (smaller) research questions, including those concerning teaching and research.

activity revealed that university teachers in Croatia have a higher quantity of teaching obligations, having increased in the past three years, which is to the detriment of research work.

Such changes, along with the demands placed on academics, will trigger discussions about their traditions – teaching and research – and about the new, still unexplored competences that have been prompted by changes and the restructuring of fundamental academic activities.

## Research objective, method and results

The research results regarding the synergy of teaching and research do not appear to yield an unambiguous solution to this relationship, a relationship that significantly effects the professional development of academics and the quality of teaching and research. Although the literature about the teaching-research relationship is relatively plentiful, how academics perceive this relationship is still underexplored. As demonstrated in the discussion above, the existing research studies mostly deal with the teaching-research relationship in academic institutions and, although some research results point to the independence of these roles, on the *policy* level, the idea of the necessary synergy between the two activities is accepted within the context of the mutual support they provide. It is equally important to mention strong trends towards giving priority to the research role of university. In reality, of course, it is academics who implement the established missions of academic institutions, and their attitude towards the dominant activities is therefore extremely important.

In order to understand how academics perceive their dominant academic roles, and to gain an insight into their reasons for such perceptions, new research was conducted, the results of which are presented in the present work.<sup>4</sup>

Within the framework of broader research, a standardised interview was conducted with 60 research participants, all members of the academic

4 This paper presents the results of research on changes in the academic profession, which was conducted as part of the international collaborative project *Academic Profession in Europe: Responses to Societal Challenges (EUROAC)*, in which eight countries participated: Austria, Finland, Croatia, Ireland, Germany, Poland, Romania and Switzerland. The main objective of the project was to examine and make a comparative analysis of changes in the academic profession on the European level (Fumasoli, Goastellec, & Kehm, 2015; Kehm & Teichler, 2013; Teichler & Höhle, 2013). The Croatian research team participated with the national project *Academic Profession and Societal Expectations: Challenges for University Civic Mission*. The results of this research (Ćulum, Turk, & Ledić, 2015; Turk, 2015) were used in the preparation and implementation of one part of the project *Academic Profession Competence Framework: Between New Requirements and Possibilities (APROFRAME)*. This project aims to determine how academics in Croatia assess the relevance of various competences, and how they assess, perceive and interpret the possession of the various competences that shape the contemporary academic profession. The project is supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the tender “Research Projects” from October 2013.

profession, and an interview protocol was developed in cooperation with an international team of researchers. The sampling strategy was harmonised with data on academics employed at public universities in Croatia and based on a database created for the purposes of quantitative research within the EUROAC project. Within the sampling strategy, due attention was paid to the organisation of the university (non-integrated (NI), partly integrated (PI), integrated (I)<sup>5</sup>), research field (participants were grouped into social and humanistic (S&H), natural and technical (N&T), and medical (M) research fields), position (research and teaching position (RT) – which includes distinguished professors and full professors, associate professors and assistant professors – and associate position (A), which includes junior researchers, assistants and senior assistants) and gender (M and F). Data on the research participants are presented in Table 1. Codes were assigned to the participants, and their identities, as well as the audio materials and transcripts generated from the recordings, are known and available only to the research team. On average, the interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes; they were conducted one on one and recorded using a voice recorder. Given the content of the questions, there was no need to “mask” the identity of the participants in data analysis and discussions.

Table 1. *Research participants*

| Organisation of the university |    |   | Research field |     |   | Position |    | Gender |    |
|--------------------------------|----|---|----------------|-----|---|----------|----|--------|----|
| NI                             | PI | I | S&H            | N&T | M | RT       | A  | M      | F  |
| 25                             | 26 | 9 | 32             | 20  | 8 | 35       | 25 | 29     | 31 |

The question designed to gain an insight into how academics understand and explain of their own role was: *Do you consider yourself more as a teacher or a researcher, or both in equal measure?* The nature of this question thus directed the initial data analysis, establishing how participants primarily see themselves, and in initial analysis data were treated quantitatively on the level of the entire sample (as the frequency of repeated answers to a given question). Within the framework of the initial orientation, the answers were then analysed taking into account distinct groups (predominantly teacher, predominantly researcher, equally both), and an effort was made to explain the reasons behind choosing one of the offered possibilities.

5 Given the organisation of the university, the research participants were divided into three groups. Non-integrated, (University of Zagreb), partly integrated (Universities of Osijek, Rijeka and Split), and integrated (Universities of Dubrovnik, Pula and Zadar).



Analysis of the research participants' answers reveals that they see themselves most frequently as teachers, somewhat less frequently as teachers and researchers, and least frequently as researchers. Analysis of the research participants' answers points to some reasons why participants see themselves primarily as teachers. First of all, it is related to the number of students, which is too large and results in an increased teaching workload. Another reason is given as the insufficient level of teaching staff at institutions, as well as the fact that teaching is perceived as an ongoing responsibility, unlike research work. Research participants also mention the increase in administrative tasks connected with teaching, as well as the lack of funding required for research.

Thus, for example, one research participant, who had worked at the university for many years and who sees teaching as an ongoing everyday responsibility, stated that the circumstances of her work make her see herself as primarily a teacher:

*"Still, I see myself as primarily a teacher simply because that's a duty, part of my job that is ongoing, that takes a specific amount of time, so you mustn't fail. (...) teaching implies a much bigger workload – to prepare in time, to teach properly, then there's the evaluation of students, and it's not like you don't care whether you're a good or bad teacher. (...) In time, you simply end up feeling more as a teacher, less as a researcher"* (Full Professor, S&H). "Investment" in teaching, which is the result of the need to satisfy new teaching programmes and the large number of students, is also connected with the participants seeing themselves primarily as teachers: *"(...) since I've introduced a lot of new courses, I've spent the last few years investing a lot of time in preparation for class and for those courses, so I've probably concentrated more on that than on research"* (Full Professor, PI, N&T). *"As a teacher. In our conditions it is very difficult to be a researcher. There are not enough funds for any larger research. I've been in the system only for the past five years (...). As soon as I arrived, I noticed how things are, and that I can't engage in serious research if I want to be a good teacher, considering I have around 600 students annually (...). Only to glance at every one of those 600 students and write their grade in five places takes full time engagement"* (Associate Professor, NI, S&H).

The reasons why participants claimed to see themselves primarily as teachers are especially challenging among associates (assistants and junior researchers), since teaching duties and the resulting self-perception as teachers are connected with greater workload and an inability to engage in research work: *"At this point, teaching de facto consumes most of my work hours, as a*

*result of the existing system, too many students, too many courses to assist at, the huge number of work hours that you must invest if you want to do your job right” (Assistant, NI, S&H); “(...) teaching is dominant and all activities connected with it are a priority; research is pushed aside, so the whole idea of a research institution might be disappearing. (...) Statistics are most important here, more important than quality, which is why the number of students is more important” (Junior Researcher, N&T); “As a teacher. Although I came here because of research, the number of students and the administration prevent me from being a researcher in the proper sense” (Junior Researcher, NI, M).*

Analysis of the answers provided by research participants who see themselves primarily as teachers points to the conclusion that their self-perception is primarily influenced by external, negatively perceived factors (large number of students, teaching workload, ongoing everyday activity, investing effort in preparation for class, lack of money for research, etc.), while answers that would imply that participants prefer teaching are almost completely missing. These (isolated) examples are an exception: *“Because of my personal scientific appeal propensities, always as a teacher, my whole life. (...) in that context, when I think about the positioning of our university, which is unambiguously research oriented, with this [teaching] dimension being rather weak, I personally don’t feel good” (Full Professor, PI, S&H); or “I’m mostly engaged in research, but I personally prefer my role as a teacher” (Associate Professor, NI, S&H).*

Apart from the example above, choosing the predominance of separate roles connected with the mission of the university is completely lacking. In other words, the organisation of universities and their missions do not appear to be factors that influence the perception of the dominant role. Moreover, the research participant who expresses the orientation of the university perceives her position as being in opposition to the proclaimed orientation.

Disregarding isolated examples that point to intrinsic motivation for teaching, the research participants’ answers introduce discussion about the job satisfaction associated with the fundamental roles of the academic profession. While research results on changes in the academic profession (Rončević & Rafajac, 2010) point to a relatively high level of job dissatisfaction among academics in Croatia, the research participants’ answers introduce a new perspective and problematise the already perceived problems regarding professional socialisation (Brajdić Vuković, 2013), where participation in the teaching process is shown as one of the basic barriers to professional socialisation for junior researchers. Furthermore, Rončević and Rafajac (2010), based on their research findings, stress that most teachers and associates in Croatia agree with the assertion of an equal level of interest in both components of academic work, with only a slightly

stronger inclination towards research. In addition, in comparison with answers from other countries where comparative research on changes in the academic profession has been conducted (CAP),<sup>6</sup> Croatian research participants were least supportive of the claim that they are primarily interested in teaching (Rončević & Rafajac, 2010, p. 58). Such research results partly contradict the results of the present research, whose participants see themselves most frequently as teachers, then as teachers and researchers, and least frequently as researchers. In national research on changes in the academic profession, Rončević and Rafajac (2010) point out that most teachers and associates agree with the assertion that they are interested in both components of academic work, with the slight tendency of a greater inclination towards research. In comparison with the answers from other CAP countries, Croatian respondents are the least inclined towards the attitude that they are primarily interested in teaching. However, within the framework of CAP research, Rončević and Rafajac (2010) discuss *interests* in teaching and research, while the data analysed and presented in the present research speak of *self-perception*, which is not the same, although it can be linked contextually.

In terms of correlated models of the teaching-research relationship (Hattie & Marsh, 1996), we could say that the research participants who see themselves primarily as teachers can be categorised in the model that points to a negative relationship between teaching and research, unlike the research participants who see themselves equally as teachers and researchers, whose attitudes reflect studies and policies that view the teaching-research relationship as positive, despite perceived difficulties regarding its achievement: *“As both equally. (...) we have quite a demanding teaching norm, and new processes and reforms of harmonisation with the Bologna demands require rethinking our role as teachers, but it can also be intriguing in terms of research. On the other hand, a university teacher must engage in research, otherwise university would be no different from two-year post-secondary schools. (...) Research groups are often groups that perform teaching activities, and then declare and carry out the unity of teaching and research work”* (Full Professor, NI, N&T); *“I see myself as both equally [teacher and researcher], since one includes the other. I think that serious research institutions must have high quality research that they transfer to their students through teaching. Without it, there is no difference between higher and secondary education systems. We are a research and educational institution; one cannot be separated from the other”* (Assistant, NI, S&H).

6 The research in question was implemented as part of the project *The Changing Academic Profession (CAP)*, which was implemented in the period between 2005 and 2007 in 19 countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Finland, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, the South African Republic, Canada, China, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Germany, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

Although in a minority, some of the research participants claim that they see themselves primarily as researchers. Their motives for such an orientation vary, but mention should be made of an intrinsic preference for the research role, which still contains the idea of the need to connect teaching and research: *"I consider myself primarily a researcher, because that is the impulse that drew me to this job. (...) Also, as a researcher and a responsible person in this society, I cannot and do not want to neglect that other segment, and I believe that one part of that research activity determines teaching. So I see myself primarily as a researcher, but because of my job, because of the young researchers we must educate, but also because of the young engineers who are being educated in this institution, it [teaching] should not be neglected. I believe that all those who ignore either of these two activities are wrong"* (Assistant Professor, PI, N&T).

When considering the teaching-research relationship, it is extremely important to keep in mind the external constraints that, as has been demonstrated, influence which role participants see as dominant, but at the same time demand an investment in research due to an evaluation system that gives priority to the research component: *"Well, even the nature of work requires us to be both equally. However, because of the evaluation system, I consider myself primarily a researcher. When it comes to advancement, evaluation and informal recognition, research results outweigh good teaching, so I invest much more effort and energy in the research part of the work, and not in teaching. So, therefore, I consider myself primarily a researcher"* (Junior researcher, NI, N&T).

Finally, it should be mentioned that only one research participant points to the importance of new dimensions in academic activities, which are seen as connected with international experience: *"I was lucky to start my career at a university in an environment that was very positive. I did my PhD abroad, and I've spent time at foreign universities several times during my career (...) I noticed that a university teacher has to be both a teacher and a researcher. I also noticed that third dimension that the university teacher must engage in, such as concern for the welfare of society, participation in the development of society, proposing, accepting projects, managing projects for the benefit of all"* (Full Professor, NI, N&T).

## Conclusion

The results of CAP research conducted in Croatia (Rončević & Rafajac, 2010) reveal that academics are less interested in teaching, but mostly interested in both components of academic work, with a slightly stronger inclination towards research. The connection between CAP research and the findings of the presented qualitative research sheds new light on the analysis of this problem.

While CAP research participants demonstrated a weak interest in teaching, qualitative research demonstrates that a large portion of participants do in fact perceive themselves as teachers, but that, according to their answers, their self-perception is primarily under the influence of negative external factors that push them to predominantly engage in teaching (too many students, which results in an increased teaching workload; insufficient personnel at institutions; the perception of teaching as an ongoing responsibility, unlike research work; increased administrative tasks; lack of funding required for research work). In other words, it appears that there is a difference between what academics are interested in (the desirable, ideal situation presented in the CAP research results) and their perception of themselves primarily as teachers or researchers (forming their own identity). Judging from the results of the present research, self-perception is predominantly a consequence of a reality that gives primacy to the teaching function. It can be assumed that identification primarily as a teacher is not a matter of choice but of necessity, that is, of the given circumstances in which the respondents work. Still, research participants show a tendency towards the unity of the fundamental functions of the academic profession – teaching and research – pointing to the importance of good research, the results of which are then transferred to students through teaching, and to the unity of research and teaching activities as a characteristic of the higher education system.

The results of the conducted qualitative research point to challenges in teaching and research activities in academic work in Croatia. Although awareness regarding their correlation and the need to develop and support them equally exists, both are burdened with problems and contradictions; for example, the pressures related to teaching are connected with neglecting research and investing time in activities connected with teaching. On the other hand, the legal acts that regulate the higher education system stipulate dedicating an equal number of working hours to both, while academic promotion requirements give priority to research over (the quality of) teaching. Furthermore, support given to the improvement of teaching and research activities is negligible or non-existent, which represents a serious challenge for the quality and desired balance of the fundamental academic activities in the higher education system in Croatia.

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