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# Training Policy at the Montpellier Mediterranean Agronomic Institute

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This symposium organized by ICAMAS on agronomic training in Mediterranean countries is a privileged occasion for an institute such as ours to ponder its own contribution and thus its activities.

ICAMAS and its institutes are an integral part of the entire Mediterranean training system and their evolution can only be fully appreciated in terms of the whole system.

Beginning with the objectives set forth when the Center was formed and with their first implementation at the Montpellier Mediterranean Agronomic Institute (M-MAI), we will examine the relevance of current training activities in relation to the demands posed by our environment. We shall then attempt to sketch some perspectives for the future as well as various proposals for tailoring those activities to the training requirements of the member countries.

A - ICAMAS was established for the express purpose of developing the qualifications of key personnel in Mediterranean countries in the field of agriculture and rural development.

By the same token, training programs set up in its institutes must make a contribution whose impact should be measurable or at least clearly appreciated in the various countries concerned.

From the outset, the training activities were keyed to a post-graduate level, that is, aimed at advanced training in the first and second cycles corresponding to what is offered by universities and institutions of higher learning involved in the Center's sphere of activity.

Furthermore, emphasis on developing the qualifications of key personnel explicitly conveys the vocation of ICAMAS institutes as being one of **continuing education**.

Whenever they are able to do so, the institutes should facilitate the recruitment of **professionals** who have already proven themselves, and for whom time spent at an institute offers an opportunity to bring their knowledge up to date as well as to acquire new qualifications in the service of the development of Mediterranean agriculture.

References to professional circles and the fact that the Center was created at the initiative of agriculture officials in southern European

countries, clearly show that the training programs offered must all be **finalized**, which distinguishes ICAMAS institutes from traditional university establishments.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the international character of ICAMAS sets it apart *vis-à-vis* the national establishments of each country. Apart from certain constraints, this situation presents a number of advantages, especially as concerns cooperation among the nations, a factor that was also emphasized in the ICAMAS founding act.

B - The Montpellier MAI, as one of the constituent institutes of ICAMAS, naturally falls within the scope of this set of goals.

Its area of specialization, namely social sciences applied to food and agriculture development, results in specific operating conditions.

The social sciences, and economic analysis in particular, are not studied for their own sake, but rather with reference to their sphere of application. Therefore, the range of training and research activities at the Institute extends from socio-economic analysis of the conditions of agricultural production to the analysis of the evolution of food consumption models, including the study of the functioning of international markets, development institutions and food and agriculture policies.

Since these problems are frequently inter-dependent, M-MAI training programs have most often aimed at generalized training, with specialization entering in gradually, instead of immediately starting with an *ensemble* of autonomous and specialized cycles.

In addition, the diversity of training acquired by trainees in their home countries, while providing a guarantee of pluridisciplinarity, does inevitably entail a more pronounced degree of heterogeneity than is involved in cycles of technical specializations addressed to a more homogenous audience.

The problems of prerequisites have always been a concern for the Montpellier Institute, which recruits agronomic engineers as well as economists and holders of degrees in other social sciences.

This generally results in the organization of common denominator instruction and modules of general training which weigh down the programs considerably before the necessary specialized studies are undertaken.

These two specific factors, among others, explain why the M-MAI is essentially organized around a basic diploma (the DSPU) with a heavy load of hours (over 600) and relatively little diversification.

The master's degree year normally includes little instruction. Depending on the option selected, it is devoted to an individual work project (in research, in professional development, or of a pedagogical nature).

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## II - Summing up and evaluation

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A-The results of training operations carried out by M-MAI since its inception are far from negligible.

In statistical terms, they may be summed up as follows:

Twenty-five classes have graduated since 1962, involving nearly 2,000 trainees.

- 1,233 obtained the DSPU

- 141 obtained the master's degree.

For the academic year which has just expired, we conferred 54 DSPUs and 32 M.S. degrees, to which should be added 35 who have gone through other training (short courses and research training courses).

Above and beyond the figures, it should be noted that a large number of trainees have attained important ranks in administrative and university circles, often holding eminent positions in Mediterranean countries - where they are naturally most concentrated - as well as in other parts of the world (sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America) where the Institute has become a hallmark of training.

The extent of the network thus formed, as well as its quality, are widely recognized as an excellent gauge of the Institute's durability.

For our part, we are less firmly convinced of this, inasmuch as history is full of examples of admirable institutions which have been swept aside by events as soon as they were no longer adapted to the exigencies of the international competition in which they were directly involved.

B - How do matters stand as regarding the evolution of our environment?

Since 1962, many things have changed for the Mediterranean region, as can be seen from the various reports presented at this symposium. The main evolutions that are of direct concern to our Institute appear to be the following:

- most of the southern countries have developed their **own systems** of training and often have high-level institutions at their disposal;

- we can observe a tendency toward **extension of advanced studies**, notably by the addition of specialization cycles beyond basic training;

- the problems have often grown more **complex**, particularly in the realm of agricultural policies, which reflect the sometimes contradictory interests of the respective nations and thus do not necessarily contribute toward cooperative action.

These three examples, while by no means exhaustive, suffice to pose in new terms the problem of the evolution of the training activities at the M-MAI.

1) The creation or multiplication of post-graduate training programs within the different member countries may affect the value of the courses offered by the Institute (DSPU, master's), which are in fact competing with the former, yet not always having guarantees of recognition with regard to academic courses and positioning in the respective public services.

The various member countries naturally tend to favour their own national training programs or foreign programs with a recognized value (for example, the French *Thèse d'Etat* or the American Ph.D.). In this connection, it should be noted that the ICAMAS diploma has the distinction of using an Anglo-Saxon designation (the M.S.) in a group of countries where Latin traditions predominate. There are some advantages in this situation, yet at the same time it is a source of difficulty,

particularly the interconnection with French doctoral training.

2) If the training structure offered by the M-MAI is justified for the reasons noted above, it may appear unadapted to the current needs of the member countries. The latter already have at their disposal an often well-provided panoply of programs. What they need above all are specific contributions corresponding to clearly identified requirements which they themselves cannot satisfy directly.

Furthermore, they rightfully wish to remain in full charge of their own training programs or to be fully involved in the conception and implementation of new actions.

3) The sphere of activity occupied by the M-MAI may entail difficulties of a special sort. Indeed, in the economic and social disciplines, the transmission of knowledge is more contingent than in other scientific disciplines. It touches on problems that are sometimes regarded as "sensitive" by the authorities in the countries concerned, as well as on occasionally contradictory interests, as already pointed out in the context of agricultural policies.

This leads us to look toward planning for cooperative actions with all the necessary precautions.

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### III - Perspectives and proposals

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Several possible scenarios are suggested by the above considerations. One scenario would consist of maintaining that ICAMAS institutes, established a quarter of a century ago to meet specific objectives, have fulfilled their missions for the most part, and now that the majority of the member countries have developed their own training systems, they have no further *raison d'être* except for the institutional momentum that is characteristic of any structure.

Another scenario would proceed from a more voluntarist hypothesis, whereby the training requirements of the member countries have evolved and thus the programs of ICAMAS and its institutes should be adapted to that evolution.

Insofar as Montpellier is concerned, the dilemma is particularly acute in the light of the analysis outlined earlier.

This is a real challenge that we are going to have to face up to.

The orientations to which we are committed are as follows:

1) First of all, we have had to review our training programs with respect to the diversity of our students and target audiences. This has involved both the basic diploma, or DSPU, and the master's degree. Both have had to be reorganized in such a way as to take that twofold diversity into account.

- Introduction of prerequisites, or entrance requirements, depending on prior university study.

- Sharper diversification of options (electives) and course orientations: economics and agricultural policies, food and agriculture economy, rural development.

- Introduction of specific branches of instruction in the second year, notably for training through research.

2) This internal action is paralleled by systematic research towards **the articulation of the international program offered by the M-MAI with the various national courses of study**, either in the trainees' countries of origin or in the Institute's host country, France.

In particular, we have favoured the establishment in Montpellier of a new doctoral program in rural economy, with joint accreditation by the University and the National School of Agriculture, in which we are actively involved.

These efforts will be facilitated if, in addition, a clear policy is defined as to the value of M.S.-type degrees *vis-à-vis* national third-cycle training programs, which we know - at least in the French context - sometimes suffer from a certain degree of complexity.

3) Priority efforts must now be focused on **new types of training** above and beyond the DSPU and master's cycles currently being offered. The

new training activities should be shaped in accordance with definite needs and with the possibilities for satisfying them. Many of the new courses can be of short duration, and they can be extended or renewed to match the directions in which the requirements in question are seen to evolve.

In December 1986, the ICAMAS Board of Directors authorized us to study about a dozen projects, as per the attached list. It is clear that our Institute will not be able to implement all of these projects immediately and systematically. It has begun, however, to work actively in this direction, so as to present to the Board of Directors those projects which appear to be most feasible.

4) The mission of **cooperation** entrusted to us by the ICAMAS charter must be reaffirmed and renewed. Admission and reception of trainees into the traditional programs, as well as planning and implementation of new training activities, must be conducted in close cooperation with the national institutions of the member countries. Thus agreements should be worked out with the relevant institutions, providing, for example, for third cycle students to spend a portion of their doctoral training at the M-MAI, or for a particular new course to be organized jointly by the two institutions. This is the case, for instance, in the plans for a joint range management program with the Hassan II Institute.

5) Alongside its independent and cooperative training operations, our Institute should develop its function as a resource center on a systematic basis.

Toward this end we have set up two units:

- a **scientific resource center**, based on our media documentation center as well as on data banks and data bases existing at Montpellier and the Institute's computer facilities; and

- a **pedagogic resource center**, having a threefold mission: research on pedagogic methods and requirements; designing and production of teaching materials (notably audiovisual); and the training of trainers.

These centers should play an increasingly important role in the activities of the Institute in

serving the interests of all of the member countries.

It is reasonable to predict that these centers will become focal points in the future development and rejuvenation of the Institute.