

NORWEGIAN STUDIES AT "ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI

Crina Leon

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Email: crina_laurentiu@yahoo.no

Abstract:

Norwegian is considered an exotic language in Romania. However, starting with the 1990s it has been a constant interest in studying this Scandinavian language, be it for a future career, for further studies in Norway, for finding a better paid job or simply as a hobby. At the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, the first Norwegian courses started in the academic year 2005-2006 when a language course was included in the Master's program "German Culture in a European Context" and when Norwegian also started to be taught at the Centre of Foreign Languages of the university for anyone interested. Afterwards, the first elective courses of Norwegian were introduced for all the students of the university in 2011. Therefore, the present article is meant to show the development of Norwegian studies at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași starting with the academic year 2011-2012 and up to 2017.

Rezumat:

Norvegiana este considerată o limbă exotică în România. Cu toate acestea, începând cu anii 1990 a existat un interes constant pentru studierea acestei limbi scandinave, fie pentru o viitoare carieră, pentru studii ulterioare în Norvegia, pentru găsirea unui loc de muncă mai bine plătit sau pur și simplu ca hobby. La Universitatea "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași, primele cursuri de limbă norvegiană au început în anul universitar 2005-2006 când a fost inclus un curs de limbă în programul de masterat intitulat „Cultura germană în context european” și când norvegiana a început să fie predată, de asemenea, la Centrul de limbi străine al universității pentru toți cei interesați. Ulterior, primele cursuri facultative de limbă norvegiană au fost introduse în anul 2011. Prin urmare, lucrarea de față își propune să arate parcursul studiilor de norvegiană de la

Universitatea "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași, începând cu anul universitar 2011-2012 și până în anul 2017.

Keywords: Norwegian studies, cultural events, teaching exchanges, education

Introduction

The "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași was founded in 1860 and is Romania's oldest university. Since the academic year 2011-2012, the Faculty of Letters of the university has offered elective courses in Norwegian language for the students on the undergraduate level from all faculties (for 2 years) and since the academic year 2014-2015 elective courses in Norwegian culture and civilization for the students in philology (for 1 year). Moreover, Norwegian courses have been offered for all categories of students or employees at the Centre of Foreign Languages of the university since 2005.

The participants have in general different educational backgrounds (philology, economics, geography, philosophy and political sciences, computer science, law, biology, chemistry, history etc.), and the groups correspond to different language levels (A1, A2 or B1). According to a questionnaire which was filled in by students and graduates of Norwegian courses in January-February 2017, out of a total of 205 responses registered, 57.1%, namely 117 students, had reached the A1 level, while the B1 level had been reached before graduation by 12.2%, namely 25 students.

Those who pass the final exam receive 3 credits or a certificate at the end of the course. Out of the 205 who answered, 44.9% (92 students) were or had been students at the Faculty of Letters, 17.6% (36 students) at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, 15.1% (31 students) at the Faculty of Geography and Geology. The others were/had been enrolled at other faculties. With a view to the reason for studying Norwegian, 30.2% (62 students) chose *further studies*, 16.6% (34 students) had a *job* in mind, while most of those who answered considered the courses as a *hobby*: 75.6% (155 students). 95.1% of those who answered had not had previous knowledge of Norwegian before starting the course at the university, and 99% considered that a further development of the Norwegian courses at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași would be useful.

Norwegian Cultural Events and Activities

In addition to the Norwegian courses, several cultural events were organized throughout the years, and moreover, a small library of

Norwegian books began to develop at the Faculty of Letters, Department of Germanic Studies, starting with March 2012. Financial support and donations of books were received from the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest, the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU), Biblioteksentralen in Norway, the National Library in Oslo, the Centre for Ibsen Studies, the Norwegian Film Institute, the NORLA foundation, the Universities of Vienna and Stavanger, the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies, as well as private persons from Norway and Romania.

Norwegian Film Days was an event held at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University between May 27-29, 2012, in collaboration with the Norwegian Film Institute in Oslo and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest. The main guest was Jan Erik Holst, executive editor at the Norwegian Film Institute, who lectured on *Norwave - The New Wave of Norwegian Cinema*. The films included in the event were either inspired by Norwegian history such as *Max Manus* (2008), *The Kautokeino Rebellion* (2008), *Yohan: The Child Wanderer* (2010), or they were screenings of works belonging to famous Norwegian writers: *An Enemy of the People* (2005, a screening of Henrik Ibsen's play bearing the same title) and *The Greatest Thing* (2001, a screening of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's novel *The Fisher-Maiden*).

In 2012 and 2013, the university hosted two exhibitions rendering Norwegian nature and culture: the photo exhibition *Northern Lights. A Journey to the Mountains of Northern Norway* by the photographer Vladimir Donkov, between May 28 - June 30, 2012, and *The Edvard Munch Poster Exhibition - 150 Years Since His Birth*, in cooperation with the Austrian Library, between November 21 - December 4, 2013. Both exhibitions became possible with the full support of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest.

In order to celebrate 150 years since the birth of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, the Faculty of Letters also organized the event *Edvard Munch 150* between November 20-21, 2013, in collaboration with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest, the Norwegian Film Institute in Oslo, the NORLA Foundation etc. Jan Erik Holst, the executive editor of the Norwegian Film Institute lectured this time on *Edvard Munch on Screen - Edvard Munch and the Film*, while the writer, biographer and translator Robert Ferguson lectured on *Edvard Munch and His Contemporaries*. The films suggested for this event were *Let the Scream Be Heard* (2013), *Edvard Munch* (1974) and *Dance of Life* (1998).

Between May 29-30, 2015, the Senate Hall of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University hosted a new Norwegian event, entitled *Norwegian Explorers from the Viking Age up to the 20th Century*, an event organized with the financial support of the NORLA foundation and in collaboration with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest and the Norwegian Film Institute in Oslo. The lectures included in the program were *The Scandinavian Gold Bracteates and Germanic Religion before the Viking Age*, delivered by Dr. Alexander Rubel, Scientific Researcher I at the Institute of Archeology of the Romanian Academy – Iași Branch and Director of the German Cultural Centre in Iași, *From Ottar to Amundsen: Norwegian Explorers of the Past Thousand Years*, delivered by the writer, biographer and translator Robert Ferguson, residing in Norway, and *From the South Pole to Kon-Tiki and Back – A Survey of Norwegian Traveling Films and Travelers in Films*, delivered by Jan Erik Holst, former executive editor at the Norwegian Film Institute in Oslo. The Norwegian films which were screened were: *Ragnarok* (2013), *Kon-tiki* (2012) and *Frozen Heart* (1999).

A history-related event took place on April 9, 2016, when Prof. Dr. habil. Silviu Miloiu, the President of the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies, held a conference on Norway during World War II, entitled *Norway under the Nazi Occupation*. April 9, 1940 is in fact the date when the German occupation of Norway began, an occupation which lasted until the Germans capitulated on May 8, 1945.

Norwegian literature was also in focus, and the students of Norwegian of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University had the chance to meet the Norwegian writer Hanne Ørstavik on October 29, 2016, within the International Literature and Translation Festival (FILIT). The moderator of the event was Lect. Dr. Crina Leon from the Faculty of Letters. The meeting with the university students followed after another discussion with high school pupils at the National College in Iași. At the university, Hanne Ørstavik talked about her own writing, she read from her novel *Love*, also translated into Romanian at the Univers Publishing House, and she talked about Norwegian literature in general, from the point of view of a writer. In 2013 and 2014, the students had had the chance to meet the Norwegian translator Steinar Lone, also present in Iași within the International Literature and Translation Festival. Steinar Lone has translated into Norwegian works such as Mircea Cărtărescu’s *Blinding* trilogy, *Nostalgia*, *Travesti*, *Why We Love Women* and *Europe has the shape of my brain*, Mircea

Eliade's *On Mântuleasa Street*, Mihail Sadoveanu's *The Hatchet*, Camil Petrescu's *The Procrustean Bed*, or more recently Dan Lungu's *I'm a Communist Bidy* and Varujan Vosganian's *The Book of Whispers*.



Steinar Lone and his translations in a meeting with the students of Norwegian (photo by Crina Leon)

Another guest was Professor Emeritus Helge Rønning from the University of Oslo, Department of Media and Communication, Faculty of Humanities. On November 11, 2016, the Department of Germanic Studies of the Faculty of Letters, in collaboration with the Royal Norwegian Embassy and Evolution Media in Bucharest, organized the debate *Are Social Media Really Social?* Other participants to the debate were Lect. Dr. Alexandru Lăzescu, the Head of the Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences, the Faculty of Letters of the university, Nora Ioniță, Public Relations and Communication Specialist, Evolution Media, Bucharest and Alexandru Grigoraș from the Educational Marketing, Events and Academic Image Department of the university. The following day, Professor Rønning lectured on *Henrik Ibsen as an Agent of Modernization* within the symposium entitled *110 Years since the Death of the Norwegian Playwright Henrik Ibsen*.

Besides the events organized with invited guests, the students annually take part in celebrating Norway's national day, on May 17, and

the Norwegian choir sings carols within the Christmas celebrations of the Department of Germanic Studies.

Teaching Exchanges

With a view to teaching exchanges between Norway and Romania, the Norwegian courses at the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași have benefited in the past three years from the visits of 7 teaching guests from Norway within the Erasmus+ and EEA agreements with the Faculty of Letters: in November 2014, Mrs. Anne Thomassen from the Adult Education Centre (EVO) in Trondheim taught Norwegian language practical courses, and later the same year, Dr. Ivar Berg from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim taught courses in the history of Norwegian language. In April 2015, Mrs. Inger Strand from Volda University College (HVO) taught Norwegian culture and civilization courses, while Assoc. Prof. Olaf Husby from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) lectured on Norwegian dialects and Norwegian phonology in the autumn of 2015.



Associate Professor Olaf Husby from NTNU teaching to the students of Norwegian (photo by Crina Leon)

In November 2015, Mrs. Tori Janne Svarliaunet from the Adult Education Centre (EVO) in Trondheim taught Norwegian language courses for the A1 and A2 levels, and in May 2016, Assoc. Prof. Benedikt Jager from the University of Stavanger (UiS) delivered lectures on Norwegian literature and culture. Last, but not least, in March 2017, Mr. Tor Einar

Sæther from the Adult Education Centre (EVO) in Trondheim taught Norwegian language courses for the A1, A2 and B1 levels.

On the other hand, Lect. Dr. Crina Leon from the Faculty of Letters undertook two teaching mobilities within the framework of the Erasmus+ and EEA agreements to Volda University College (March 2015) and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (September 2016). Moreover, in the past three years Dr. Crina Leon authored the book *På reise i Romania. Norsk-rumensk parlør*, Sypress Publishing House, Oslo, 2015 and collaborated with Professor Arne Halvorsen from NTNU on *Norsk-rumensk ordbok, Bind I (A-K)*, Tehnopress Publishing House, Iași, 2015. She also translated from Romanian into Norwegian *Magazin de literatură foarte tânără/Tidsskrift for de unges litteratur*, StudIS Publishing House, Iași, 2016 and from Norwegian into Romanian Reidun Aambø, *Typisk norsk å være uhøflig?/Impolitețea-tipic norvegiană?*, Volda University College, Volda, 2017. Besides, she participated in several teachers' seminars organized in Norway for teachers of Norwegian at universities outside Norway: seminars organized by the University of Agder, August 26–29, 2012 and August 24–27, 2014, by the University of Oslo, June 22 – July 10, 2013 and July, 18–August 3, 2016 and Volda University College, March 18–20, 2015.

Conclusions

Either attracted by the Vikings, Norse mythology, Norwegian music, the midnight sun and the northern lights, the opportunities of studying in Norway or simply visiting the country, or the possibility of using Norwegian in a future job in Romania, tens of students yearly enroll for the Norwegian courses offered by the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași. In order to increase the quality offered by these courses, Norwegian professionals have been invited to teach courses or lecture on different topics of interest. Moreover, Norwegian film days and exhibitions have been organized. Supplementary funding for events as well as the development of a Norwegian library was due to the support of the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU), the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bucharest or the NORLA Foundation. Donations of books were received as well especially from Norway. Guest lecturers were moreover invited within the framework of Erasmus+ and EEA agreements. The fact that Norwegian language and culture could be

promoted at the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași strengthened even more the Romanian-Norwegian cooperation which develops in different fields also due to the EEA and Norway grants Romania has benefited from.