

A.3: The External Environment and Strategic Imperatives Arising from it

The Pontifical Athenaeum S. Anselmo (hereafter: SA), as an international institution based in Rome, must face up to a rapidly evolving external environment which is undergoing a multifaceted change with at least six dimensions:

- The **world as a whole** is transforming (demographical development in Europe and other continents, secularisation, vocational crises, economic crises, multipolarity, multiculturalism).
- **Academic competition** is becoming stronger and stronger, both locally in Rome (nine ecclesiastic universities offer foundation theology courses), and internally, while the total number of theology students is falling almost everywhere.
- The **Italian state** does not offer subsidies to Private Academic Institutes and the role of the **Holy See** is limited to granting SA the title of “Pontifical Athenaeum” which does however remain important in attracting students.
- **Ecclesiastical legislation on Catholic education** (e.g. the Apostolic Constitution, “*Sapientia Christiana*”, relationships with the Holy See in general as well as with the Congregation for Catholic Education specifically) is impacting upon SA’s future.
- The European context of the “**Bologna Process**” brings with it new opportunities and challenges, however it also requires significant effort, asking us to collaborate with the Holy See’s Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO).
- The **Benedictine Confederation** is undergoing several changes, not all of which are positive in terms of SA’s future (a decrease in the total number of monks along with an increase in the number of decentralised establishments in the Confederation).

All of these rapid external changes are already having a significant impact on SA’s institutional ability to attract students and manage the Athenaeum. It will be impossible to avoid the challenges which the aforementioned developments present for SA; this is why an urgent “**update**” is necessary for our survival. This precarious situation does not however offer only threats, it may also be the source of multiple opportunities for development, for growth and for creativity in translating (rather than betraying) the charisma and the gamble that is a Benedictine university in Rome in the XXI century.

Below are listed, in order of priority and urgency, the threats and the opportunities in three sections: B (academic), C (support), D (resources), along with a generic list of some of the proposed solutions to be developed later on.

Threats

a) Academic (→ B.4, B.5):

- Increased competition locally and internationally for all three cycles: baccalaureate, license, doctorate. In Rome, in particular, there are already English language first cycles (e.g. at the *Angelicum*) which sometimes also attract Benedictine students.
- Reluctance of Benedictine monasteries to send students to S. Anselmo, preferring the option of local training or even other schools in Rome. It is likely that the reason for this no longer concerns the uncertainty surrounding the monastic discipline at the College, and is instead down to linguistic issues as well as to the somewhat “liberal” reputation of theology at SA.
- The lack of Benedictine professors. Also linked to the vocational fall and the corresponding closure of monastery schools of theology.
- The increasing number of African and Asian students, along with the decrease in European students requires the provision of an academic service which is adapted to individuals from more varied cultures and educational backgrounds – meaning that both teaching and administrative management (e.g. the grading and recognition of examinations taken and educational qualifications obtained in a huge range of countries worldwide) are much more difficult as a result.
- The lack of a clear strategy for partnerships or academic alliances despite SA belonging to a vast international network.
- Dependence on guidelines issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education. These instructions limit the space for potential academic development, but also offer the required legal framework.
- Lack of recognition of qualifications from pontifical universities in some countries.

b) Support:

- Partial indifference of the Benedictine Confederation towards SA. → B.4
- Impact of information technology (IT) on the academic curricu-

lum, on teaching and learning, research, marketing etc. → B.6, C.9

- Increase in administration required to comply with external standards and respect quality assurance criteria. → C.10
- Increasing requests from students for greater support with more accommodation and services, the possibility of a student canteen, courses in languages other than Italian, more space available to students and “green” options, etc. → C.12
- Structural problems with Athenaeum services. → C.9, C.12, D.16
- Lack of linguistic skills among personnel and sometimes also professors to be able to provide appropriate support to students who do not have a sufficient command of Italian. → D.15
- Lack of a *job description* for the Athenaeum’s various departments. → D.15

c) *Resources:*

- Lack of financial scholarships to manage the new reality (statistically verifiable) of higher numbers of students coming from poorer backgrounds. → B.4
- Stagnation of personnel in terms of academic development/research/external activities/technology. → B.5, B.7, B.8, C.9
- Lack of clear identification of present and future key stakeholders. → B.4, C.11, D.13
- Dated infrastructure which is sometimes obsolete and involves high maintenance costs. → C.9, D.16
- Excessive dependence on decreasing sources of income. → D.14
- Lack of centralised coordination of specific fundraising to obtain scholarships. → D.14

→ All of these challenges are counterbalanced by the following:

Opportunities

a) *Academic:*

- Paying particular attention to the current specializations at the Institutes. Some of these Institutes are the only ones of their kind in the world, both in terms of their methods and their natures. → B.4, B.5.
- Encouraging, during the Abbots’ Congress, the presence of more Benedictine students at SA. → B.4
- Greater involvement of women and above all the introduction

of more attractive and integral course offerings for Benedictine nuns. → B.4

- Opening up to a clientele which is not strictly academic (e.g. spirituality courses, pastoral and practical skills, leadership courses for managers). → B.5
- Promoting ecumenical exchange and inter-religious dialogue (e.g. with the Valdese Faculty of Theology). → B.5, B.8
- Inviting SA professors to participate more actively in international theological discussions (through publications, conferences, symposiums) – Reinforcing SA’s voice within the Catholic market. → B.7, B.8
- Inviting internationally renowned modern theologians/philosophers with great insight to SA to revive theological discussion and attract attention (see Cipriano Vagaggini Lectures). → B.7
- Carrying on the memory and the dynamic of the great theologians who have worked at SA. → B.5, A.1
- Encouraging bishops and the international episcopal conferences to send students to SA. → B.4; C.11
- Providing a solution to the new markets for distance learning with the appropriate technology. → B.5; C.9.
- Promoting the Athenaeum’s publications and increasing their quality and quantity. → B.7, B.8, C.11
- Promoting membership of alliances and academic networks. → B.8, C.10
- Collaborating with other universities of the same nature as S. Anselmo to create local networks and exchange experiences on possible solutions shared/supported by others – as is already the case for the ecclesiastical libraries in Rome (URBE).
- Forging closer relationships with our affiliations (also in terms of student exchanges).
- Ensuring SA’s presence in international academic associations.
- Increasing our public and social presence in Rome (exhibits, concerts, academic open days). → B.8; D.16
- Offering intelligent yet discrete hospitality for events/congresses held by other organizations linked/similar to SA. → B.8; D.16
- Focussing more on the excellent reputation and fame of the values and the “classic” individuals linked to the Benedictine world: e.g. Benedict of Nursia, Anselm of Aosta, Hildegard von Bingen. Promoting SA as a place which embodies, with intellectual sincerity, our spiritual and intellectual heritage in today’s world. → C.11

- Profiting from the “Bologna Process” on a European level and contacting experts to ensure greater recognition of pontifical academic qualifications. → C.10
- Organising symposiums, congresses and courses in the summer months (*summer courses*). → D.14, D.16

b) *Support:*

- Increasing involvement of the guest house and its guests in the services offered by the Athenaeum (offering seminars, even just for two or three days, including accommodation at SA’s guest house, e.g. by the monastic institute: offering spiritual exercises at S. Anselmo). → B.8
- Coordinating the purchasing of information technology (IT) to ensure quality and economic convenience. → B.6, C.9
- Incentivising lecturers to use information technology (IT). → B.6, D.15
- Creating a “student office” to provide students with information on support services. → C.12
- Providing infrastructural support to nuns who wish to study at S. Anselmo (accommodation, etc.). Contacting mother superiors at convents in Italy and worldwide. → C.11, C.12
- Defining, on behalf of SA’s upper management (decisional level), the Job Descriptions and the functions of all Departments, as well as hypothesising on changes to assigned personnel or integration of the same. → D.14, D.15
- Promoting harmony between SA’s College and Athenaeum: e.g. concerning the timetable, which must respect the academic rhythm, but also concerning students coming from abroad. → D.13, D.16
- Developing a “responsibility profile” to be followed by internal and external professors, also in the form of a preliminary official document. → D.15
- Setting up a green space for students; space for breaks. → D.16

c) *Resources:*

- Increasing collaboration between SA and the monastic teachers or study directors responsible for the future of their houses. → B.5, C.11
- Improving communication with the Benedictine Confederation. Making sure monasteries feel they can consider SA their home in Rome. Investigating honestly the reasons why some monas-

teries feel estranged from SA. Being open to criticism and suggestions from monasteries (e.g. from novice-masters). → B.8, D.13

- Planning student recruitment campaigns; creating a system of “prizes” which could attract high quality students. → C.11
- Promoting marketing and advertising presence as much as possible. → C.11
- Improving the Athenaeum’s website and ensuring that it is continually updated. → C.11
- Making the most of social and virtual networks to make SA better known and more present: e.g. using *Facebook* and *Linkedin*. → C.11
- Nurturing relationships with alumni. → C.12
- Encouraging the collaboration of the Athenaeum’s leadership with well-qualified individuals with managerial experience in the academic sector in order to improve the Athenaeum’s management. → C.10; D.13, D.15
- Increasing funds for scholarships, establishing coordination of the fundraising intended to gather funds for academic scholarships which SA can offer to interested students. → D.14
- Developing a strategy for the recruitment of new (Benedictine) professors. → D.15