HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN ROMANIA WITH A FOCUS ON BOLOGNA PROCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, QUALITY ASSURANCE, AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

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Abstract

The education system of Romania was punctuated by major educational reforms that shaped its course. The education system of Romania can be categorised as having distinctive periods of convergence (late 18th century- pre-WWII, 1968-1969, and 1989-present) and divergence (during most of the Communist regime) with, and from, the education system of Western Europe. Starting in 1999, the Bologna reforms have revolutionised the education system in Romania. New education legislation was passed to keep up with the changes enacted by the ministerial meetings of the Bologna Process. The higher education system oscillated between centralism and autonomy following the years after the collapse of the Communist regime. This article analyzes the education system in Romania with a particular focus on institutional autonomy, quality assurance, and social dimension.
Key-words: educational reforms, history of education, Bologna Process, institutional isomorphism, diversification, institutional homogeneity, academic mobility, institutional autonomy.

HISTÓRIA DA EDUCAÇÃO NA ROMÊNIA COM FOCO NO PROCESSO DE BOLONHA EM INSTITUIÇÕES DE ENSINO SUPERIOR: UMA ANÁLISE INSTITUCIONAL - AUTONOMIA, GARANTIA DE QUALIDADE E DIMENSÃO SOCIAL

Resumo

O sistema de ensino da Romênia foi marcado por grandes reformas educacionais que moldaram o seu curso e pode ser categorizado como tendo períodos distintos de convergência - final do século 18, pré-Segunda Guerra Mundial, 1968-1969, e 1989 ao presente - e divergência - maior parte do regime comunista e a partir da integração no sistema de ensino da Europa Ocidental. A partir de 1999 as reformas de Bolonha têm revolucionado o sistema de ensino na Romênia. A nova legislação da educação foi alterada para permitir o andamento do Processo de Bolonha e o sistema de ensino superior oscilou entre centralismo e autonomia. Este artigo analisa o sistema de ensino romeno com um foco particular sobre a autonomia institucional, garantia de qualidade e dimensão social.
Palavras-chave: reformas educacionais, história da educação, processo de Bolonha, isomorfismo institucional, diversificação, homogeneidade institucional, mobilidade acadêmica, autonomia institucional.

The education system in the 19th century in Romania

The end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century is characterised by spread education movement typified by the development of pedagogical theory in all Europe including Romania. Well-known pedagogues of the period such as Pestalozzi and Froebel were preoccupied with the practical and theoretical aspects of the education system while Herbart and Diesterweg stressed the importance of recognizing pedagogy as a discipline.

Froebel (1782- 1852), the first German theoretician of preschoolers' education, believed that children are born with innate creative abilities and schools have the role to enhance these creative abilities in children. Pedagogical theories like Froebel's influenced the development of the school system in Romania. In 1912, there were 912 Froebelian schools opened in Romania out of which 699 were state-run and 423 were private schools (Stanciu, 1977).

In 1849, Transylvania was occupied by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As such, it was governed by the laws of Hungary. A democratic law passed in Hungary by Ioszef Eötvös in 1866 applied to Transylvania and it spread in the other provinces of Romania. The changes enacted by this law included: setting the duration of the primary school cycle of six years, establishing the language of instruction, and allowing parents to participate in the decision-making process regarding school matters.

In 1869, the Minister of Education, Andrei Saguna, passed an amendment modelling the educational legislation enacted in Hungary. The new legislation known as *the Organic Status of Education*, or, *Statutul Organic al Invatamantului* (1869), aimed at improving the education system in Transylvania - every village had a public school and the language of instruction as well as the textbooks were in the Romanian language (Konstatntinov et.al., 1959; Konstantinov et al., 1953).

The second half of the 19th century brought unprecedented changes to the education system in Romania. This period is influenced by the ideas espoused by the classics of universal pedagogy. Pedagogues such as Comenius, Niemeyer, Ziller, Rousseau, and Locke built upon the theoretical frameworks espoused by the earlier classics. A strong emphasis was placed on the primary grade instruction and the training of teachers (Stanciu, 1977). According to Stanciu (1977), "the development of the pedagogic theory is intertwined with the general process of the development of the Romanian sciences, (...), especially, humanistic sciences-anatomy, physiology, and psychology (Stanciu, 1977, p. 341). Another characteristic of this period was the avalanche of textbooks on teaching training and instruction in education. The textbooks published included, but were not limited to: *Methods and Pedagogy for teachers of primary schools* written by Vellini (1860); *Elements of pedagogy and experimental and theoretical methodology* (Eliade, 1868); and the conference publications by Barnutiu in 1870 (Stanciu, 1977).

The education system in the 20th century in Romania

Education scholars in the 20th century expanded on the changes introduced in the 19th century in Romania. Among the contributors to the modernization of the education system in

Romania in the 20th century were Constantin Dumitrescu Iasi (1849-1923) and Spiru Haret (1851-1923).

Iasi and Haret are known to have set up the basis of the modern Romanian educational system. The former, an erudite schooled at Sorbona University where he received his PHD in Mathematics, Minister of Education (1897-1899; 1901-1904; 1907-1910), passed educational reforms for the primary, secondary, and tertiary grade levels. He is particularly known for the educational reforms regarding the primary schools from rural areas and the training of the teachers working in the rural areas. He believed that the teachers had the power to transform the reality of the villages and contribute to teaching literacy to the masses (Baku, 2001); in 1890, only 22% of the Romanian population was literate (Stanciu, 1997). Spiru Haret also passed the Educational Law of 1868 which set up the basis for the Vocational Schools and reorganised the education system at the secondary level. The latter , Constantin Dumitrescu Iasi, a University professor and consultant for Spiru Haret, along with Spiru Haret reorganised the education system at the university level and also divided the high schools, or *liceele,* into specialities such as realist, modern, and classical high schools, or *licee de profil real, modern, si classic* (Stanciu, 1977).

The law promulgated in 1939 built upon the laws passed in 1924 to 1928 which concerned the primary and high school education, and teacher training and focused on primary and secondary education and "provided for the organization of experimental schools for adapting some pedagogical theories to the particular needs of the primary school" (Marin, 2001, p.126). According to Marin, the educational framework of the education system of this period was highly secular and elitist.

Three major educational periods after 1930

The education system after 1930 can be divided into three distinctive periods marked by changes in the educational policy (Popescu, 2011).

The first period between 1930 to 1944 was marked by fruitful accomplishments throughout the educational system (e.g. the public education system expanded, teacher education programs improved, and private education showed progress during this time). The educational system was "moderately decentralised" during this period characterised by a diversified curriculum (i.e. "uniform-base curriculum" combined with an adopted one for regional variations), textbooks, and experiential learning (Nedelcu, 1995).

The educational system between 1944 and 1989 was highly centralised by the government in Romania. The Communist Party claimed to represent the interests of the people and extended its areas of influence in education:

> The school system operated through a governmental apparatus that extends downward from the ministries to the various educational sections of the county, town, and commune people's councils. Strict adherence to a given party line in educational as in all other matters is assured by the Party positions held by politically influential educators and by the ex officio presence of Party and UTC (Union of Communist Youth) representatives in the major administrative bodies if most educational institutions. (Braham, 1977, p. 8)

The second period: 1944-1989

The essential features of the second period were "extreme centralisation with a single base curriculum and textbook, excessive politicizing, and an emphasis on the abstract and theoretical in method and teaching" (Nedelcu, 1995, p. 101). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2000), the educational system of Romania in this period was one of the most centralised systems of education in Central and Eastern Europe (Braham, 1977).

During this second period of the development of the Romanian school system, researchers identify three educational reforms (Popescu, 2002; Braham, 1977):

> The first, in 1947, aligned Romania's Western-oriented educational system with that of the Soviet Union; the second, in 1955, called for reorganisation of the schools along politechnical lines [...] the third reform in the 1960's was designed to further Romania's long –range plans for industrialization and technical development and fostered change in general education, higher education, teacher education, and the vocational system. (Braham, 1977, p. 1)

It aimed for nationalization of all educational institutions, alignment of the educational system with the changing economic system and imbuement of the educational system with Marxist-Leninist principles (Braham, 1972). The second reform aimed to reorganize the school system along politechnical lines to ensure "a greater synchronization of theoretical-academic studies with industrial and agricultural production" (Braham, 1979, p. 10). The third educational reform was enacted into law in May 1968 and implemented in the beginning of 1968-1969. According to Braham (1979), among the achievements of the third reform were

> the revitalization and modernisation of higher education and alignment of Romania's higher education with the modernization process occurring in the west; extension from 8 to 10 years of free and compulsory education; a rise of enrollment at all levels; and, reorganization of vocational education. (p. 1)

The education system after the collapse of the Communist regime

The third major period of the educational system is after the collapse of Communism- a period marked by a systemic reformation of education in Romania

The sociopolitical and economic transformations in Romania since 1989 along with the pressures for a market economy and alignment with the democratic principles (Nedelcu, 1996; Parvu, 2008) and the pressures imposed by the Bologna Declaration (MED, 1990) eventuated in reform of the education system. The Minister of Education characterised the education system in 1999 as bearing "the traces of Eighteenth Century romanticism, Nineteenth Century positivism, Eastern European socialism, and the unorganised efforts to bring about change after 1989" (Marga, 1999, p. 131). Therefore, due to the ferment on the political scene, structural reformation of the educational system was inevitable.

The first three years following the Revolution were a period of transition - a period that lacked the development of a coherent educational legislation (Radulescu, 2006). The aim was to decentralise and depoliticise the educational system through the passing of new policies in

education. According to Popescu (2010), the definition of decentralisation of education takes many forms, but, it is closely related to school-based management, self-management, and autonomy. Although decentralisation penetrated all the structures of the educational system, at the secondary level, the process of decentralisation proved to be slow.

In 2009, the Government enacted the Laws of National Education and made the necessary provisions. The provisions, for the most part, concerned decentralisation:

> Decentralisation in pre-higher education has been piloted for three academic years and the policy documents that introduced it have been permanently amended and updated, more than a decade later, this reform has not been reached its aims mainly due to the various changes on the political scene. (Popescu, 2010, p. 315)

Higher education in Romania: overview

The higher education system before 1989 was deemed one of the best functioning in South Eastern Europe and the closest to Western Educational systems (Damian, 2012; Daxner, 2003). Although there were flaws in the education system such as restricted upward mobility of staff and non-existent outbound mobility of students and staff within the European Higher Education, the prestige of the university studies was very high. Professors involved in lifelong learning were remunerated and the public highly regarded university graduates. Professors' accession to the highest positions within the Romanian universities was, in most of the cases, a strenuous task. It required political affiliation to the Socialist Party or to the Romanian Communist Party (Damian, 2012). According to Damian, "at the university leadership level, deans and rectors had to be first approved by the party, and then, in the case of rectors, by the Ministry of Education" (p. 57).

The purpose of the education system of this period (pre-1989) was to fill the demands of the market demand that went hand-in hand with industrialization and agrarian society; therefore, the Communist regime accentuated the need for more technical programs, such as engineering programs, and severely slashing into the humanistic and sciences programs and created engineering programs (Damian, 2012). "In 1980, the overall percentage of engineering students was approaching 50 percent, which in real student numbers reflected the need for developing a more diversified industry" (Damian, 2012, p. 58). After the collapse of communism, these engineering programs drastically reduced in number due to the emergence of a capitalist society that replaced the agrarian/industrial society. According to Eisemon et al (1999), "engineering enrollments have dropped precipitously from 65 percent from total enrollment to 38 percent in 1992-1993" (p. 64).

Higher education in Romania in the transition years, after the collapse of Communism (1989-1992), was oscillating between centralism and decentralism (Reisz, 2006). As such, the development and implementation of educational reform in higher education was a slow process (Birzea, 1994; Radulescu, 2006). The major objectives on the educational reform agenda at the university level were aimed at "1)developing a coherent framework for education policy, 2) attracting foreign partners to co-finance education reform, 3) enacting

new educational legislation and related regulations, and 4) restructuring the higher education system to meet the new economic, social, and political needs" (Reisz, 2006, p. 76).

The period between 1992-1996 is considered to be a prolific period for the higher education system where decentralisation was visible through greater deregulation of the higher education system. Among the initiatives for decentralisation were regulation of administration, degrees, promotions, academic programs, and enhancement of the curricular platforms. By 1993, the Ministry of Education in Romania implemented the following objectives on their agenda for educational reform:

> improved curriculum by refreshing the list of disciplines, enhancing international conference sessions organized in faculties, revival of the academic scientific production, progress equipping with modern equipment of faculties and departments, expanding group of specialists who participated in the meetings and international scientific activities. (Buda, 2008, p. 70)

This period is also characterised by a proliferation of private higher education institutions (Reisz, 2006). The Law of Foundations, enacted in 1924, allowed the private education sector to open educational institutions (Reisz, 2006). The law allowed the private higher education sector to open their higher education institutions.

Starting in 1993, the government of Romania commenced a series of negotiations with World Bank and OECD experts to restructure its education system. The World Bank experts along with Ministry of Education experts, and government officials developed a strategic plan for a systematic reform of Romania's pre-tertiary education system. The first reform was initiated in October, 1994 and it was financed by the Romanian government and World Bank; the second major educational reform began in 1995 and it was financed by EU Phare to restructure the vocational education (OECD, 2000).

Along with these initiatives aimed at systemic educational reform, the Bologna reforms contributed immensely to the systematic restructuring of the education system in Romania. In 1999, the Romanian government's representatives and ministry officials, along with other 29 European countries, signed the Declaration of Bologna.

The Bologna process: overview

Regarded as the result of increased competitiveness between European higher education and centers of higher education in the United States and other regions of the world (Nokkola, 2012), the Bologna Process has deep-rooted historical legacies which date back to 1950, a time when the objective of creating a unified Europe, "a United States of Europe" (Corbett, 2012), a "Europe of Knowledge" was formulated. After 1970, subsequent treatises reinforced the need for creating a unified Europe through the provision of quality education (Massachrit Treaty, 1989), an objective allotted to the higher education institutions (HEIs): "After 1970, governments promoted the short-term student mobility through the Erasmus programme - the first of the kind at that time" (Teichler, 2012, p. 485).

Ensuing treaties, such as the treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, invested the EU with the responsibility of developing a new knowledge pillar of education. These objectives were

further enhanced by the Lisbon Declaration that committed itself to make out of Europe "the most competitive and knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (Corbett, 2012, p.43). The objective of creating a higher education policy and area for dialogue became a reality in 1999 when the Bologna Declaration was signed (Teichler, 2012; Bologna Declaration, 1999).

The Bologna Process in Romania

As previously discussed, the reforms of the Bologna Process are in full swing in Romania. The reforms aim to create a knowledge-based economy and informed workforce in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Process and the EU's legislative principles. The shift toward a market-oriented model was noticed after the adoption of the Bologna Process (Dobbins, 2011). The main objectives of the Bologna Process were: "introduction of a higher education system with three cycles (bachelor, master, and doctorate), quality assurance and recognition of education qualifications and study periods" (Pislaru, 2009, p. 27). The cross-national education platform is based on mutual agreements between the signatory countries on e.g., study structures (Bologna Declaration, 1999), increased university autonomy (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Prague Communiqué, 2001), regional student mobility (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010; Bucharest Communiqué, 2012), transnational qualification framework (Bergen, 2005), and national qualifications frameworks (London, 2007; Bucharest , 2012).

The Bologna Process brought with national legislative changes such as "compulsory education reduced to eight years, secondary education diversified, academic lycees receiving renewed attention, reducing class size and teaching loads, minority language education was permitted, and education finance was reorganized" (OCED, 2000, p. 13). According to some scholars, the Bologna's slow progression and implementation may be related to the Ministry of Education and Research's ineffectiveness in clearly explaining the tangible objectives of the Bologna Process (Damian 2012; Radulescu, 2006).

The Bologna Process and higher education in Romania

A new wave of change at the university level was brought by the Bologna reforms. In 2004, the Romanian Parliament passed the Law on the Structure of University Studies mandating a three-tier system for post-secondary education in accord with the revised principles of the Bologna Declaration (www.sar.org); the three-tier system replaced the two-tier system initially mandated by the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

A new law was passed on February 2011 and it aims to diversify the universities' mission as well as to expand its opportunistic principles, such as diversifying its mission and optimising the resources for university research (Damian, 2012). The law was passed as a result of the Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the Higher Education Area (www.sar.org): "In Romania, the prevailing opinion is that the exceptional, "unprecedented examples of regional, cross-border cooperation in higher education", as stated in the 2010 Budapest-Vienna

Declaration on the European Higher Education Area, has made the Bologna Process irreversible" (Damian, 2012, p. 68).

Vassilou (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of the educational systems of the signatory countries and explored at what stages the countries were in implementing the objectives listed on the Bologna Process agenda. An evaluation of the national mobility benchmarks in Romania revealed that although "there are indicators relating to internalisation and performance, aiming to increase inbound student and staff mobility, there are no benchmarks and targets for outbound mobility" (Bologna Process Report, 2010, p. 127). This report indicates that the objectives of the Bologna Process have yet to be implemented.

The Bologna Reforms in higher education: with a focus on university autonomy, social dimension, and quality assurance

In an European context, the aforementioned objectives, or action-oriented principles, have been implemented to various degrees in each signatory country (Bologna Implementation Report, 2012) while others may lack sufficient data collection at a transnational scale (e.g. mobility patterns) (Pusztazi & Szabo, 2008; Nakkola, 2012; Bologna Implementation Report, 2012).

University autonomy

Researchers in the academia contend that higher education cannot be contextualised without considering the driving forces that directly or indirectly have an impact on the dynamics of the higher education system at the institutional, national, and supranational level (Middlehurst, Texeira, 2012). Among the driving forces are "rising marketisation" (Middlehurst, Texeira, 2012), pressures for institutional, national, and global isomorphism, and the market economy. Governance is defined as the "formal and informal exercise of authority under laws, policies and rules that articulate the rights and responsibilities of various actors, including the rules by which they interact" (Werner & Weber, 2001, p. 351).Similarly, Moscati (2012) identified three elements of the governance platform: management, administration, and institutional leadership. These three elements create a unified cohesive institutional platform. With regard to this last point, Gallagher (2001) states that it is

> the structure of relationships that bring about organisation coherence, authorise policies, plans and decisions, and account for their probity, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness. Leadership is seeing opportunities and setting strategic directions, and investigating in and drawing on people's capabilities to develop organisational purposes and values. Management is achieving intended outcomes through the allocation of responsibilities and resources, and monitoring their efficiency and effectiveness. Administration is the implementation of authorise procedures and the application of systems to achieve agreed results. (p. 121)

Middlehurst, Texeira (2012) identify two types of governance: internal and external. The external governance model is a highly bureaucratised model with a locus of power external to

the institution and regulated by officials at a national, continental, and/or global level that influence the legislative and educational frameworks of the higher education institutions.

Autonomy and accountability go hand-in-hand in the higher education sphere "in Europe, the direction of travel is from control to autonomy with accountability, and the comparison also shows a similar trajectory to Europe in terms of governments' reform agendas" (Middlehurst, Teixera, 2012, p.541). Autonomy encompasses four domains:

> organisational autonomy (internal strategy, academic and administrative structures, institutional leadership and governing bodies); academic autonomy (academic profile, degree structure, student issues, quality assurance); financial autonomy (procurement and generation of own finding); and staffing autonomy (management of staff and recruitment procedures). (Estermann, 2009, p. 8)

There is a causality effect between the higher educational reform and autonomy (Paradeise et al, 2009): "reforms have often massively increased the degree of formal and actual autonomy of universities in defining their internal governance structure" (p. 205). This can be exemplifies through student mobility rates, increased performance, and better institutional management (Curaj et al., 2012). Among the countries that enjoy a high degree of autonomy at university level are Germany and Sweden (Bologna Report, 2013).

Institutional autonomy in HEIs in Romania

The National Education Law in higher education, passed in 2011, built upon its previous principles and enforced institutional autonomy and public accountability. Institutional autonomy entails the management of the institution's platform including its mission, objectives, structure, and management of physical and human resources (National Qualifications Authority, 2011).

On the other hand, public accountability entails the compliance with invigilated laws whether national, transnational, or international. The National Qualifications Authority defines public accountability as

> the obligation (of any higher education institution) to comply with the legislation in force, its Charter and with the national and European policies in the field of higher education, to apply regulations in force on quality assurance and evaluation in higher education, to observe equity and university ethics policies, to ensure management efficiency and efficient use of public funds, to ensure transparency of all decisions and activities, to observe the academic freedom of the teaching staff, the auxiliary teaching and research staff, as well as the rights and the liberties of students. (NQA, 2012, p. 4)

Diversity, diversification, and differentiation in higher education

Diversity in HEIs has a multidimensional facet. When the term "diversity" is used to mean "diverse profiling of higher education institutions", it is synonymous with "differentiation" and it refers to "the composition of an institution' s student body or staff with respect to its ethnic, religious, or gender variety" (Reichert, 2012, p. 812). The meaning of the term not only

conveys diverse profiling in terms of its composition, but it also refers to the functional diversity of an institution.

The general transnational agreement among universities is the attractiveness toward functional diversity in the context of institutional diversity (Reichert, 2012). According to Reichert (2012), functional diversity encompasses "varying emphases on the different functional dimensions of HE activities, such as research, teaching, services aiming at business innovation or continuing professional development" (p. 818).

The mission statements of HEIs have to include the implicit and explicit trends of diversification. Within this context

> institutional diversity results from a complex interplay of different conflicting forces which include explicit national regulations, policies and funding instruments, but also, other rewards and incentives, which are sometimes too easily ignored in national approaches to diversification, such as quality assurance standards, career advancement practices, stakeholder values and support, regional policies and support as well as international and scientific developments and academic valu. (Richert, 2012, p. 829)

Reichert (2012) argues that universities are ranked by different measures including reputation and overall performance assessments conducted by peer-review committees which may trigger competition among staff or institutions. This trend is called institutional isomorphism and it is defined as a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1984, p. 147), or, simply, an emulation of other universities' perceived high standards.

The selection criterion of students also plays an important role in the institutional differentiation process. A myriad of factors mingle to create a diversified higher education system.

Institutional homogeneity or diversification of HEIs in Romania?

After the fall of the Communist Regime, the higher education system entered a state of "uncontrolled diversification" (Andreescu et al., 2012). This "anarchic" period (Andreescu et al, 2012; Miroiu et al, 1998), or "post-revolutionary-psychosis" as Reisz (2004) called it, was characterised by increased diversification and proliferation of new public and private HEIs. The demand for new programs, forbidden or limited in the communist era, led to the proliferation of new public and private HEIs although "for a while private universities experimented with (frequently very contested) programs and admission practices" (Andreescu et al. 2012, p. 872).

According to Andreescu et al (2012), the first period (1990-1995) is a period of increased "uncontrolled diversification" marked by changes at the institutional level including adoption of new curricula, creation of new university programs, and diversification in terms of academic staff, and an increase in institutional autonomy. The authors said that "after decades of strict control, (referring to the Communist regime), universities claimed substantial levels of institutional autonomy". The second major transformation characteristic to the period

was the development of a new funding scheme for both the public and private HEIs (Andreescu et al, 2012).

The Education Law of 1995 left the HEIs as

> a rigid, under-financed system, unresponsive to the actual demand for initial and continuing training, dependent on the central decisions (ministry), using egalitarian criteria for organisation and management, a system which would not promote study programmes diversification, performance, quality and competitiveness. (National Qualifications Authority, 2011, p. 18)

As a result, in 1995, the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation was founded and strict regulations were placed on the private higher education institutions, which were forced to emulate the standards of the older-established universities (Andreescu, et al, 2012).

The period between 1997-2004 is characterised by the beginning of the implementation of four major objectives: decentralisation of academic and financial management, networking with other regional, national, and supranational HEIs, improvement in quality in HEIs and research, increased access to HEIs. Miroiu (2012) reports that, starting in 2003, the government introduced the idea of quality in higher education systems: "the idea was to use the so-called quality indicators which would account for the allocation of a part of the funding", adding, however, "the incentives to increase quality and to develop specific strategies were ineffective" (p. 800).

The years 2004-2010 saw a continuation of the implementation of the aforementioned objectives. As well, there was the reorganisation of the Romanian higher-education system according to the Bologna Declaration, the implementation of ECTS, and the Diploma Supplement (National Qualifications Authority, 2011). This period is also characterised by a decrease in the student-enrollment base in public HEIs, which, "heralds pressures for diversification" (Andreescu et al, 2012).

Institutional homogeneity as opposed to diversification is the latest trend noticed in Romanian HEIs. In the article addressing this subject, Andreescu et al. (2012) argue that the Romanian higher education institutions are institutionally homogenous. The institutional homogeneity is manifested through "the relative lack of diversity [...] in institutional structures, professional norms and the structure of the professoriate, in the design of academic programs and in educational content" (p. 863). This concern is echoed by Miroiu & Vlasceanu (2012):

> One striking characteristic of the Romanian higher education system is its homogeneity, or at least the existence of a powerful process of weakening the differences between State and public universities, between old and new ones, between large and small universities, between comprehensive and highly specialised universities. Their mission (as codified in the university Charters) is quasi-identical, their organisational structures, types of study programmes and their organisation, as well as content, procedures and practices related to teaching and research, the internal regulations are all similar...and at most incrementally different. (p. 802)

As Andreescu et al. (2012) explain, the institutional homogeneity of the Romanian higher education system is a recent trend triggered by changes in the national legislation such as the law promulgated in 2011, which introduced a system of rankings and classification as well as supranational concerns for rankings and classifications, manifested through initiatives such as U-map and U-Multirank). On the other hand, Andreescu et al (2012) also attribute this particular trend - absence of diversification - to the "effort to change the quality assurance in Romania from a heavily accreditation-biased system to a more service-oriented one, and therefore, to a system which is more sensitive to institutional particularities" (p. 864).

As such, institutional isomorphism is characteristic of the Romanian higher education system. Institutional isomorphism can be divided into three distinctive categories: coercive, imposed by external environments, agencies, or institutions upon which the institution depends, mimetic, the emulation of the perceived high standards of an institution, and normative, rules imposed through legislation (DiMaggio; Powel, 1983). Andreescu et al (2012) argue that all of the three institutional isomorphic characteristics are imbued in the structure of the HEIs and it is hard to quantify which isomorphic characteristic (s) is/are more predominant. Conversely, others regard the coercive isomorphism as being the predominant trait that characterizes the Romanian higher education system (Miroiu; Andreescu, 2010; 2012).

Quality assurance

As with the development of the Bologna Process and its historical ties that go back to 1950, so is the accession of the quality assurance that goes back to 1985 when the UK, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands founded pilot evaluation projects in the member states, later, to be initiated in Central and Eastern Europe through the initiative of the European Commission (Sursock, 2012). The scope of the pilot projects was to assess quality assurance in the member and associated states.

Although the principle of quality assurance was briefly touched in the Bologna Declaration in 1999 stipulating the "promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies" (Bologna Declaration, 1999), it was not until 2001, when a specific action-plan related to Q.A. was drafted (Prague Communiqué, 2001). The Prague Communiqué (2001) encouraged cooperation among all the signatory and non-signatory states and called upon stakeholders, different agencies, ENQA, and higher education institutions to draft a plan, or a common framework of reference and disseminate best practice regarding quality assurance. And, the ministerial conference in Prague represented the stepping stone in acknowledging an urgent need for creating a quality assurance agency.

In 2003, the signatory states' representatives further acknowledged that the quality assurance of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). Subsequently, the ministerial meeting in Bergen (2005) drafted the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the "overarching qualifications framework", also known as QF-Ehea, was formulated (Bergen, 2005). The ministerial conference in London (2007) urged its signatory countries' delegates to

design national qualifications frameworks that emulate the "overarching qualifications framework" (London Communiqué, 2007). And, in this scheme of methodological planning, the Bologna Process' delegates drew their attention to the European Network Qualifications Assurance, later to be called the European Qualifications Assurance Agency (2004), for expertise and guidance in the establishment of a quality assurance platform for European higher education (www.enqa.eu). European Network Qualifications Assurance (ENQA) was founded in 2000 with the purpose of providing quality assurance in higher education. In 2004, the communication platform changed from a network into an agency, although the acronym remained the same. ENQA's purposes are threefold: representation at a national/ transnational scale, to develop other quality assurance processes within the Ehea and, to function as a communication platform for sharing and disseminating information and expertise in quality assurance among members and towards stakeholders (www.enqa.eu/profile).

Quality assurance and learning outcomes

The Bologna Implementation Report (2012) emphasizes that successful implementation of the Bologna prerogatives such as learning outcomes depends upon the "implementation of ECTS, student-centered learning, qualifications frameworks, internal quality assurance with higher education institutions and other important action lines" (p. 50). The report also shows that in the 46 signatory countries of the Bologna Process the learning outcomes are reinforced either through legislation or "guidelines or recommendations". Among the 47 signatory countries, only Slovakia doesn't encourage the implementation of learning outcomes (p. 50).

Quality Assurance plays a crucial role in monitoring and assessing learning outcomes. In most of the signatory countries, learning outcomes are measured through external quality assurance, by means of the assessment of programme accreditation/approval by external evaluators. Belgium, the Chech Republic, and Finland employ internal quality assurance procedures with external tracking in the form of external audit and Armenia uses "stakeholders' feedback" (Bologna Implementation Report, 2012, p. 51).

The purpose of quality assurance is to enhance the quality of service delivery in higher education, or as the Bologna Implementation Report stated, the QA is "designed to achieve, maintain or enhance quality as it is understood in a specific context" (p. 60). But, Sursock (2012) warns that quality and quality assurance should not be conflated; QA should not be regarded as a transparency tool aimed at international comparison, but the focus should be on enhancement of QA processes.

National actors and policy makers should also play close attention to the internal quality assurance processes and the changes in legislation should be reflective of the changes in the internal quality assurance processes. The same holds true for the external quality assurance (Sursock, 2012). Although Sursock (2012) warns that increased accountability and involvement of stakeholders into the QA process leads to a shift in the locus of decision making to the external parties; in this case, students and staff won't be able to participate in the QA processes. However, the pendulum of participation in the decision-making process at an institutional level between stakeholders and the members of the institutions should be

balanced (Hopbach, 2012). The Bologna Implementation Report (2012) shows that in eleven countries, students participate in all aspects of the quality assurance systems, in thirteen countries, students are involved in three out of five aspects of the quality assurance process, and in five countries, students are involved in two out of the five aspects of the quality assurance, including in Romania and Italy.

Quality Assurance is an emerging model for ensuring best practices in higher education, whether, it has efficient assessment tools to define and evaluate these best practices, it still remains to be seen.

Quality assurance in Romania

The Bologna Implementation Report (2012) shows that in eleven countries, students participate in all aspects of the quality assurance systems; in thirteen countries, students are involved in three out of five aspects of the quality assurance process, and in five countries, students are involved in two out of the five aspects of the quality assurance, including Romania and Italy.

A study conducted by Ilie et al. (2012) on the quality of higher education in Romania - note: in this conference report, quality and quality assurance are used as two interchangeable terms; it measures institutional success and performance - revealed a moderate index of implementation. In terms of student mobility, transparency of educational offers, the Matrix of Quality Indicators, the benchmarks used by the researchers to determine the quality of higher education, shows negative outcomes while assessment of quality of university training, the usefulness of the diploma, and students' chances on the labour market, it shows a moderate outcome.

This study's findings parallel the concerns and suggestions made by Geven (2010) in *Quality Assurance is a Process of Growing Up*. Geven (2010) stated that quality assurance in Romania is also entering in a stage of adolescence since ARACIS has started its activities in 2005. Improving quality assurance is a task that requires daily dedication and with those on the ground with the clear aim of improvement, rather than control (p. 31).

 Enhancement of quality assurance processes instead of transparency has been suggested by other researchers in academia (Sursock, 2012). Transparency can be defined as competition among higher education institutions for receiving the best ranking. Quality is concerned with the process of instruction itself and setting measurable outcomes that could be achieved.

As noted somewhere else, Quality Assurance is an emerging model to ensuring best practices in higher education. It is the measuring stick to the health of the education system, or, lack thereof.

What is the relationship between the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and Qualification Framework in the European Higher Education Area (QF-Ehea)?

In a conference report by Blomqvist et al. (2012), it was noted the two qualifications frameworks are not identical but have a common façade in regards to compatibility and objectives. For instance, "the compatibility has been explicitly stated in the EQF

Recommendation" in that "the descriptor for the higher education short cycle corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5, the descriptor for the first cycle to the learning outcomes for level 6, the descriptor for the second cycle to the learning outcomes for level 7, and the descriptor for the third cycle to the learning outcomes for level 8" (p. 6).

According to the presenters, countries can develop national qualifications frameworks that "are compatible with both frameworks", but "the national qualifications frameworks developed within Ehea have to be compatible with the QF-Ehea" and it is conducted through a process of self-certification implemented by the national authorities (Blomqvist, 2012, p. 6). Similarly, the EQF goes through a "referencing process" under the guidance of the procedures set by the EQF Advisory Group. According to Maguire (2012), there are only ten countries that completed self-certification as of February 2012. Among them are Belgium (2009), Denmark (2009), Germany (2009), Ireland (2006), Malta (2009), The Netherlands (2009), Portugal (2011), Romania (2011), UK-Scotland (2006), and UK-England (2009) (p.11). Quality assurance agencies play a crucial role in the self-certification of each country. "The role of quality assurance is to demonstrate that programmes are based on intended learning outcomes and that qualifications are awarded on basis of achievement of these outcomes" (Blomqvist, 2012, p. 38).

QA also plays a crucial role in the implementation and assessment of learning outcomes, design of national qualifications frameworks, and recognition. Therefore, the link between the aforementioned components cannot be studied in isolation (Blomqvist et al, 2012).

NQF in Romania and the self-certification process

The design and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in higher education in Romania started in 2005 and was finalized in 2011 when the National Education Law was passed. The law strengthened "the legal and institutional framework that creates a coherent, transparent, and flexible national framework and opens new perspectives for the development and recognition of this framework by all stakeholders" (National Qualifications Framework, 2011, p. 4).

The self-certification process started in 2010 and was finalized in 2011 in Romania. It included alignment and prooving the alignment of the Romanian National Qualifications Framework with the QF-Ehea and EQF, establishment of quality assurance bodies, and consultation with international experts. It is conducive to the development of a quality culture built on four pillars: quality, transparency, transferability, and progression. The Self-Certification Report (2011) included the implementation of the self-assessment criteria and procedures. Among the criteria stipulated in the Self-Certification Report are: clear representations between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework; and all the Diploma Supplements should include clear links between the national framework and European frameworks. Among the procedures listed were: the inclusion of international experts in the self-certification process; the national body had to certify the compatibility between the national framework with the European framework. The Self-Certification Report (2011) outlined the steps that Romanian

Quality Assurance took in order to reach the goal of self-certification - it showed that Romania created a functional framework for qualifications and it demonstrated the compatibility between the Romanian Qualifications Framework and the two European reference frameworks (i.e. Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area and the European Qualifications Framework).

The National Working Group, the Romanian national body entrusted with the responsibility of self-certification, determined that the NQF was compatible with the EQF and the QF-Ehea: for instance, the doctorate level in Romania's (NQF) corresponds to the third cycle (QF-Ehea), and level 8 for both the Romanian National Qualification Framework and European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (National Qualifications Authority, 2011). In other words, the Romanian qualifications 6 (undergraduate level), 7 (graduate level), and 8 (post-graduate level) correspond to the EQF qualifications' levels 6, 7, and 8 (NQA, 2011, p. 54). For instance, NQFHE level 6 descriptor, "knowledge and understanding of basic concepts, theories and methods within the field and the specialization area; their adequate use in professional communication" corresponds to the EQF-level 6 descriptor, "advanced knowledge of a field of work or study involving a critical understanding of theories and principles", and with level six descriptor of QF-Ehea, known as Dublin Descriptors, "have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education" (Self-Certification Report, 2011, p. 70).

According to the National Qualifications Authority (2011), the Romanian NQFHE is outcome-based and it includes more detailed descriptors than those outlined in the QF-Ehea and EQF. The NQFHE Matrix includes two dimensions: cognitive dimension and skills and other attainments dimension, which are then converted into a hierarchy of learning outcomes and then into professional and transversal competencies (NQA, 2011, p.32). Upon the successful completion of the two competencies, the student is issued a Diploma accompanied by a Diploma Supplement. According to NQA (2011), all universities in Romania issue a Diploma Supplement in both Romanian and English. Also the Diploma Supplements have to show the relation between the national framework and the European framework (NQA, 2011).

The social dimension

The social dimension of the Bologna Process was first discussed in the Prague Conference in 2001 and reiterated in the Bergen Conference in 2005. The ultimate goal was to provide access to higher education to students from diverse backgrounds in order to ameliorate the inequality patterns historically inherent in the higher education institutions (Prague Communiqué, 2001; Bergen Communiqué, 2005). According to the Implementation of the Bologna Report (2012), there was no operational definition of the social dimension until 2007. In 2009, the ministers of the signatory countries "decided to set measureable criteria for widening overall participation and increasing participation of under-represented groups" (p. 71).

According to the same source, data derived from EACEA/Eurydice 2010 reported that there is insufficient data on the social dimension and that many countries haven't set up a monitoring system or specific targets on the social dimension (p.71), a statement that is

contradicted in the subsequent pages of the Implementation of the Bologna Process Report. For instance, page 82 shows that according to the BFUG reporting system "Most Ehea countries indicate that they have put in place systematic activities allowing them to monitor the composition of the student body according to different characteristics - e.g. gender, disability, age, social background, migrant status, etc. -" or that "although the majority of countries have already put in place monitoring activities allowing them to capture the composition of the student body, the monitoring systems do not always cover all groups defined as under-represented and/or they do not allow capturing all relevant student characteristics" because of the constraints of the law (The Implementation of the Bologna Report, 2012, p. 81). According to the Bologna Implementation Report (2012), other aspects of the social dimension - i.e. non-informal "access routes to higher education"; initiation of student services; financial support systems - have been implemented to various degrees at a transnational scale.

Conclusion

The education system in Romania in the 18th and 19th century was influenced by the ideas espoused by the classics of universal pedagogy. In the 20th century, there were periods of convergence and divergence with, or from, the Western education system. The education system post-communism eventuated in reform, a reform triggered by educational transformations at a transnational level (aka Bologna Process).

Whether or not the B.P. has been bolstering or impeding the development of an innovative education system in Romania, time will write its course. But, for now, the inevitability of questioning its efficiency within the context of accurate parameters of analysis and definitions - e.g., student mobility, institutional autonomy -, or lack thereof, is preordinate in establishing new lines of inquiry.

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