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Higher Education Reforms in Romania

Between the Bologna Process and National Challenges

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Editors
Adrian Curaj
UNESCO Chair on Science and Innovation Policies, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA)
Bucharest
Romania

Ligia Deca
University of Luxembourg
Luxembourg
Luxembourg

Eva Egron-Polak
Secretary General
International Association of Universities (IAU)
Paris
France

Jamil Salmi
Global Tertiary Education Expert
Bogota
Colombia

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Contents

Romanian Higher Education in 2009–2013. The Bologna Process and Romanian Priorities in the Search for an Active European and Global Presence

Adrian Curaj, Ligia Deca and Cezar Mihai Hâj

Keywords Romanian higher education reform · National education law · Internationalization · Strategic projects · Evidence-based decisions

1 Introduction

In the recent years, higher education policy has attracted an increased attention both in Europe and beyond. This was partially due to its growing role in economic development through skills, knowledge and innovation, but also to the increasing diversification of missions, funding streams and delivery modes, which have made higher education one of the most important expanding service sectors in the society. Based on previous higher education systemic configurations and strategic endeavours, Romania has undergone significant reforms in the period 2009–2013, which are only now showing effects.

Against this background, the present volume is based on the research conducted in the frame of the 'Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making: a necessary premise

A. Curaj (✉)
UNESCO Chair on Science and Innovation Policies, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: adrian.curaj@uefiscdi.ro

L. Deca
University of Luxembourg, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), Luxembourg City, Luxembourg
e-mail: ligia.deca@uni.lu

C.M. Hâj
Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: cezar.haj@uefiscdi.ro

C.M. Hâj
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania

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for progress in Romania' project, which was implemented by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) in the timeframe February 2012–February 2014 and was co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Operational Programme "Administrative Capacity Development". The project aimed to increase the capacity of public administration for evidence-based policy making in the field of higher education, while focusing on good practices at international level and impact assessment. With the contribution of the national and international experts, the project has generated a number of studies on existing higher education public policies, such as: quality assurance, internationalisation, equity, student centred learning, transparency tools, data collection, the Bologna Process, financing of higher education and capacity building.

Numerous experts and policy makers participating in the project's consultative events considered the project as very timely and adequate to the needs of the Romanian system. It was developed in a time in which information on the status-quo and impact of different policy options in various areas was highly needed, since the Law of National Education (Law 1/2011) needed to be complemented with a number of secondary legislative documents and strategies. Additionally, the themes analysed within various project components were also relevant for Romania's positioning within various international policy processes, such as the Bologna Process and EU2020, especially in light of Romania's commitment to formulate a higher education strategy for the 2014–2020 timeframe and the recent experience of Romania as a key player in the Bologna Process (host of the 2010–2012 Bologna Secretariat and organising the 2012 Bucharest Ministerial Conference and Bologna Policy Forum).

UEFISCDI brought its contribution to grounding Romanian higher education and research policy on solid evidence along the past decade, by enabling both practitioners and policy experts to exchange views in a larger frame of mutual learning and by attracting resources for strategic projects on various strands. The project on which the current research volume is based has been the last one in a series of initiatives described in greater detail in chapter III and its results are relevant for both national and international higher education communities and policy experts, as well as for the broad future direction of Romanian higher education.

The main aim of this research volume is thus to improve the information on Romanian higher education reforms through well documented analysis, as well as to formulate concrete evidence-based policy proposals, which could be transformed into future policy solutions in the Romanian higher education system.

2 Setting the Scene

2.1 Romanian Higher Education—Configurations and Imbalances (1990s–2007)

As with many other sectors, higher education in Romania has passed since 1990 through dramatic transformations following a radical change in the country's

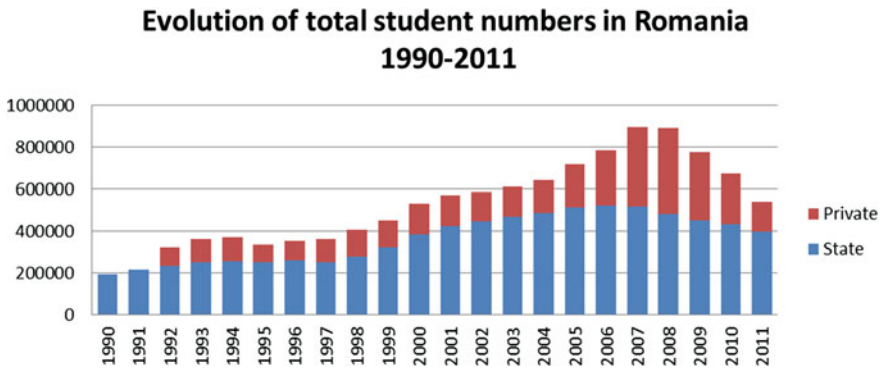

Fig. 1 The evolution of total student numbers in Romania (1990–2011) NIS "TEMPO online" data base

political and governance system. The transition from a highly centralized totalitarian regime to democratic governance has been marred by many problems.

The numbers of higher education institutions (HEIs) and the higher education participation rates have increased rapidly since 1990, together with a large diversification of specialized study programs offered by different institutions (Fig. 1). Such a wide post-1990 expansion followed on the dramatic constrictions imposed on higher education by the former communist regime.

The key axis of institutional diversification in the 1990s was the public/private one. As seen in the Fig. 2, the number of public institutions increased 2.5 times in 10 years, from 48 public HEIs in 1990 to 121 HEIs (out of which 58 were public and 63 private) in 2000. Private HEIs mushroomed and provided study programs mostly in social sciences and humanities. Public HEIs diversified also their study programs. Such a development responded mostly to a very high demand for higher education degrees coming from people coming from various walks of life. For responding to such a high demand and in connection with a lack of adequate public subsidies to higher education, candidates to higher education degrees followed the routes of both public and private higher education. Moreover, apart from the number of state subsidized study places, public higher education institutions were also allowed to deliver higher education programs while charging tuition fees like the private HEIs.

Change in the number of students (Fig. 3) was institutionally neither matched the evolution of teaching staff, nor with that of public funding (Table 1). Student/teacher ratio has been doubled, recruitment of young academic staff was almost put on hold, and teaching and curriculum innovations were delayed (Fig. 4).

Looking at how public financial support to higher education evolved (Table 1), one may see a clear lack of proportionate evolution in relation to the expansion of student numbers and number of higher education institutions. A smaller public pie was to be divided among an increasing number of beneficiaries.

According to Eurostat data, the risk of poverty and social exclusion fell from 45.9 % in 2007 to 40.3 % in 2011. Despite this significant progress, Romania is still

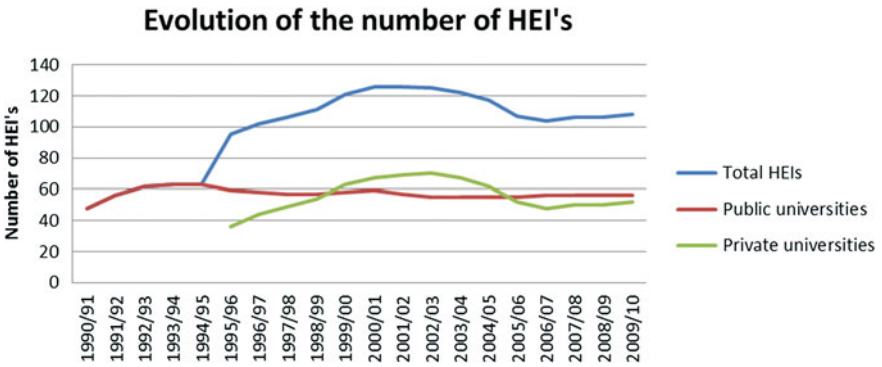

Fig. 2 The evolution of the total number of HEIs (1990–2010) NIS "TEMPO online" data base

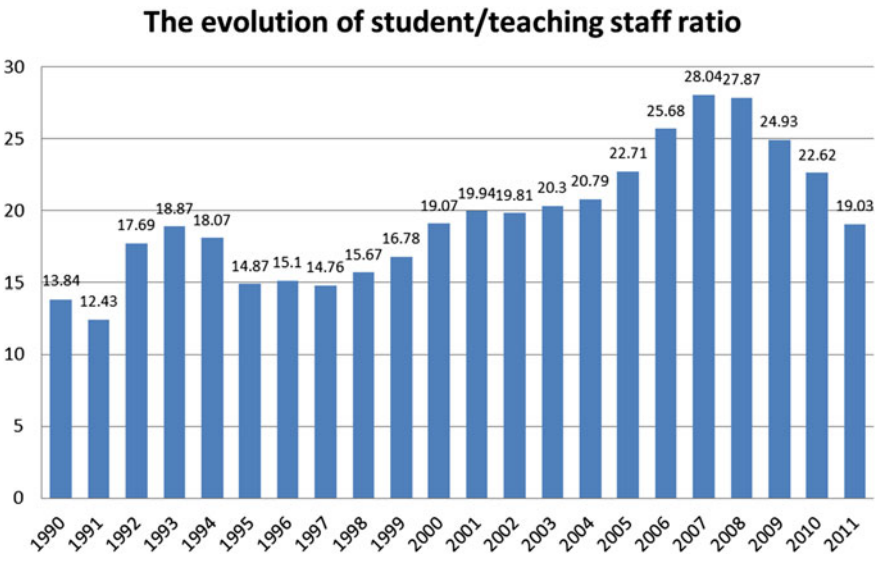

Fig. 3 The evolution of students/teaching staff ratio 1990–2011

among the countries with the highest rate of risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe, almost twice as high as the EU average. Only Latvia and Bulgaria had higher poverty and social exclusion rates. In this sense, investment in higher education as a mean for social mobility becomes increasingly relevant.

Regarding access and equity, available data[1] show that the number of students accessing higher education has steadily decreased (especially in private HEIs), this being coupled with a decreasing number of students that passed the baccalaureate

[1] UEFISCDI "Equity in the Romanian Higher Education System" (UEFISCDI 2013).

Table 1 Public core funding in the 1999–2010 timeframe

Year	Total core funding (mil. RON)[1]	EUR (yearly average value exchange rate in lei)[2]	GDP Volume (mld. euro)[3]	Core funding share in GDP
2003	633.15	3.76	52.60	0.32
2004	847.26	4.05	60.80	0.34
2005	1,041.24	3.62	79.50	0.36
2006	1,175.35	3.52	97.70	0.34
2007	1,680.73	3.34	123.70	0.41
2008	1,947.30	3.68	139.70	0.38
2009	1,950.04	4.24	118.20	0.39
2010	1,908.68	4.21	124.40	0.36
2011	1,710.61	4.24	131.30	0.31
2012	1,675.28	4.46	132.00	0.28

[1] National Council for Financing Higher Education (CNFIS) 2012 Report (www.cnfis.ro)
[2] National Bank of Romania Exchange rate (www.bnro.ro)
[3] National Institute of Statistics (NIS)—Tempo online (PIB Production method current prices)

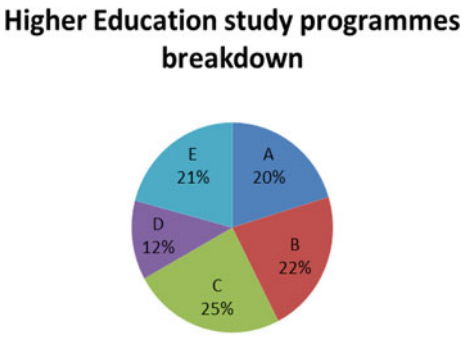

Fig. 4 The breakdown of higher education programmes into the five specific ranks

(57 % in 2012). The participation of under-represented groups has been preserved at a very low level. Only 3.8 % of young people aged 25–29 from the 20 % of the poorest family backgrounds have graduated one cycle of higher education compared to 52.4 % of the top 20 % affluent sector (World Bank 2011). As for the youth from a rural background, the number of students has decreased by approximately 10 % in 2007–2011 (Institute of Educational Sciences 2012). According to the National Institute for Statistics (NIS), at the beginning of the 2011–2012 academic year there were only 333 disabled students in the overall Romanian higher education system (out of total 539.852 students). Moreover, ethnically disadvantaged groups have had a very low chance of participating in higher education. For instance, less than 1 % of the Roma population graduated higher education since 1990.

Regarding the internationalization of higher education, "after the events in 1989 and the collapse of the communist regime, the foreign (students) interest in Romania began to rise again, but the apathy of public authorities and of universities

led to a decrease in Romania's importance on the international higher education market." (Pricopie 2004).

Due to the European student exchange programs implemented following the late 1990s, the number of incoming mobile students to Romania is two to four times smaller than the number of outgoing students,[2] the size of the imbalance depending on the mobility type and duration. At the level of the EHEA, Romania is seen as a 'closed system' (EHEA 2012), with low incoming and low outgoing student numbers comparative to other countries.

The creation of a **new legislative framework** for higher education has passed through several stages. At the very beginning of the 1990, amendments to the communist legislation were made, while new legal initiatives liberalized and democratized the system. In 1993 the legal framework for accrediting higher education institutions and the procedure for diplomas recognition were established (Law 88/1993 amended through Law 144/1999) together with the creation of the National Council on Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) the precursor of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Romania (ARACIS), which also set national accreditation standards for higher education providers.

The autonomy of university was instituted after 1990, primarily by the Romania's constitutional acts, which guaranteed university autonomy, and then by the first comprehensive law of education adopted in 1995 (Law 84/1995). Higher education institutions have been granted the autonomous rights to establish and implement their own development policies. However, for certain aspects (such as the personnel and financial policies) the autonomy of universities was still limited. Such constrictions on university autonomy have had ever since negative consequences on higher education. For instance, according to a Joint Report of the European Commission (European Commission: Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs—Economic Policy Committee 2010), Romanian policies regarding higher education staff have caused a 'relatively low absorption of young teachers and a lack of flexibility in terms of recruitment'.

After 1999, a new public financing mechanism for higher education was implemented, based on block grants and bilateral contracts between the Ministry of Education and the higher education institutions and with a component calculated on a cost-differentiated per student capita formula (Ministry of National Education: National Council for financing Higher Education 1999). Thus, the two pillars of the public funding formula were: (1) *"block grants"* allotted according to a per capita cost-differentiation formula, as the main part of the overall universities' public funding, and (2)*"differential financing"* of universities (introduced in 2002), based on a qualitative component (i.e. calculated by considering qualitative indicators which were updated regularly). Public funds have been allotted by applying a per

[2] Data from the data collection process conducted in 2011 in order to assess and classify universities and study programs
http://uefiscdi.gov.ro/articole/2535/Clasificare-universitati-si-ierarhizare-programe-de-studii.html

capita formula and a section of overall public sum allotted to universities, which varied over time, was disbursed according to a series of qualitative indicators.

Introduced in 2002, the qualitative component (based on process and input indicators) of the financing formula was constantly developed and the percentage of the overall university financing allotted according to qualitative criteria increased every year, reaching up to 30 % in 2010. However, the relevance of such criteria proved to be very low when considering the need for institutional differentiation.

Another milestone in the development of the Romanian Higher Education system was its becoming part of the Bologna Process. Romania signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999. Various steps towards implementing the principles and objectives of the Bologna Process have been taken by individual universities, while in 2004 specific legislation was adopted and national-wide measures towards the implementation of Bologna Process were taken. Since 2005, higher education study programmes have been organized into three cycles: first cycle (Licence/Bachelor), second cycle (Master) and third cycle (PhD, Doctorate), as provisioned by Law 288/2004. Also, the ECTS and the diploma supplement have been introduced as mandatory elements for each university.

One of the main achievements of the Romanian higher education, with a view to becoming an active and attractive part of the European Higher Education Area, was the adoption of the Law 87/2006 on quality assurance in education. This law has a trans-sector approach to quality assurance, covering all the education service providers in Romania. The Law on quality assurance in education includes:

- Methodological principles for quality assurance/accreditation in higher education;
- External quality review procedures and criteria for institutions and programmes level;
- Quality assurance at institutional level (Internal QA guidelines);
- Institutional arrangements involved in quality assurance.

The Law also provides the establishment of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) as an independent public institution with competences in accreditation, quality review and quality assurance.

2.2 Main National Changes to the HE System After 2007

When considering various policy reforms in Romania, it seems to be unavoidable noticing that higher education was one of the areas with many hectic debates, mostly focused on its legal provisions, despite the fact that legal changes do not immediately induce variations in practice or mentality. For instance, since the 1995 Education Law was adopted it passed through continuous amendments thus arriving in 2005 to have more changes than actual articles.

By 2006, a Presidential Commission, appointed by the President of Romania, was expected to change the overall approach. The Commission was expected to

primarily make an analytical and comparative diagnosis of the state of the national research and higher education system within the European context, while also identifying ways and means of eliminating the already emerged imbalances and shortcomings. The Commission issued the report "Education and Research in Romania" (Presidential Commission 2007) and submitted it to public debate. The report was concluded with the statement that the higher education and research systems were in need of far reaching and substantial reforms and modernization and that these may stand a good chance of being successfully implemented as long as they would bring together nor just researchers and academics but also as many stakeholders as possible. Following on the public debates, a '**National Pact for Education**', as a political document endorsed by all political parties and key stakeholders, was adopted. Based on the analysis and the pact, a reform strategy —"Education and Research for the Knowledge Society" (Presidential Commission 2008)—was developed and agreed with the key stakeholders.

The *National Pact for Education* set ambitious objectives to be reached by 2013 such as curricular reform, improvements in the management of higher education institutions, full university autonomy, classification of universities by their mission statements and achievements and ranking of study programs (connected with the financing system), introducing student charter, improving equity in higher education and lifelong learning programs, as a basis for increasing participation rates in higher education.

Such policy documents were then considered as offering the grounds for adopting a new law in education and research, in order to generate the legal framework that would facilitate new developments and corresponding competitive outcomes in higher education.

The arguments used to underline the need for a new education law were given by all the above-mentioned documents. The arguments were:

- *The need for excellence in Higher Education*. This need was based on the identified "mediocrity of the Romanian Higher Education System", as "no Romanian university had reached the top 500 in the Shanghai world ranking or high positions in other world or European rankings"[3] and since HEIs were seen as failing to fully meet the needs for local and national development in terms of skills, knowledge and innovation;
- *The need to increase scientific production* in order to become more competitive (by reaching at least the EU average indicators);
- *The uniformity or lack of diversification of universities in the system,* as all universities in the country, public or private, considered themselves as institutions with both higher education and research missions, according to their university charters, while failing to factually demonstrate appropriate performances in either of the two areas;

[3] http://www.shanghairanking.com/

- Due to the uniformity of universities, *public funding was also highly uniform* with little incentive for improving quality of education and/or research outcomes (mainly due to the funding formula).
- *The lack of university autonomy. Previous human resource policies* had negative effect on employment and promotion and consequently on the performance of universities.
- *The inefficiency of the collegial management system of Romanian universities.*
- *The need for a more student centred approach,* as students were deemed to be partners in the educational process.
- *The inequity of the higher education system* in view of the low participation rates for students from rural areas, from different disadvantaged groups etc.

The new ***National Education Law*** was adopted on the 5th of January 2011 and included a set of provisions that targeted the above-mentioned perceived flaws of the Romanian higher education system. In what follows, we will look at how these provisions are foreseen in the new law, as well as how they were operationalized in practice.

Regarding the need for excellence in Higher Education, one of the elements operationalized in the law were the *incentives for university consortia,* as an important step to enhance the effectiveness of the university management and to increase the institutional capacity in order eventually to be better positioned for serving stakeholders expectations and in international rankings. Even though university consortia and university mergers were encouraged, in order to reach an institutional critical mass and improve the management of resources and quality of higher education, by 2013, only two universities decided to merge on a voluntary basis, although the demographic decline of young cohorts is expected to reach its peak by 2015.

With the need to increase the scientific production, provisions related to research were also introduced in the law, having a better positioning in international rankings as a main goal. As a consequence, the law included a new approach regarding doctoral studies, and made research criteria highly prominent when assessing staff and institutional academic excellence. In the same vein, excellence is highly supported through different incentives in the law. Two types of doctoral education were introduced: the research doctorate—with the objective to produce scientifically relevant knowledge at international level, eligible only for full time studies (its completion being also a precondition for achieving an academic career within higher education institutions) and the professional doctorate—aimed at producing knowledge by applying scientific methods and systematic reflections over a set of national and international standards. The reform of the doctoral cycle has not yet been finalized.

Also, in order to tackle the problem regarding the lack of diversification or uniformity of universities, the idea of differentiation of higher education institutions and of their provision was introduced in the law by means of a university classification mechanism. Institutional diversification was so proposed as to differentiate between three categories: advanced research universities; teaching and research universities and teaching oriented universities. The university classification was to

be based on output criteria and performed every four years. The classification process envisaged two stages. The first was "*the identification stage"* in which each university was invited to identify and assume its own mission, as well as provide data and information, which would substantiate that mission. Subsequently, the processed data and information would then generate institutional classes. The second stage—"*the consolidation stage"* included an institutional evaluation to be undertaken in order to assess and help enhance institutional quality provision, within the context of each university's mission and the various different classes that have been identified.

Following this regulation, the first classification process was done in 2012[4] and became the first indirect visible result that the law produced. The results of this first classification exercise showed that there were 12 research-intensive universities, 30 teaching and research universities and 48 teaching universities in the Romanian higher education system at that point in time.

The independent Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) was selected to undertake a system-level evaluation process, as part of a project carried out with the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI). Using the IEP guidelines, each volunteering institution was evaluated by a team of international experts—including university leaders, as well as students, and higher education professionals—all from outside Romania. The evaluations focused on a broad range of issues such as institutional mission and how this relates to the classification exercise, supporting quality provision, quality assurance mechanisms and strategic management. The project is due to be finalized in 2014 and all evaluation reports are publicly available.

The ranking of study programmes was also performed, within the same data collection process as the classification. This process aimed to provide information to potential beneficiaries with regard to the level of academic quality provision in the areas of teaching, research, student services, community services and internationalization. The process included two main stages: data gathering based on the inputs from the higher education institutions themselves in a standard format and institutional evaluation—the IEP. The evaluation comprised 1,074 study programmes from 59 study domains that were divided in five specific types (A > B > C > D > E, where > meant better results than).

An important note on this topic is the fact that the process was highly contested by stakeholders. The methodology of data processing on which universities were evaluated was not made public, as well as the relationship between different criteria in establishing the class or rank. In this context, the processes of classification of universities and ranking of study programmes were contested and suspended in court. No new university classification or ranking of study process has been conducted since.

[4] http://chestionar.uefiscdi.ro/

Regarding the public funding of universities, the law introduced different types of financing depending on their objectives such as: core financing, complementary financing, institutional development financing, etc. The core financing of universities should, according to Law 1/2011, take into account the results of the classification exercise and the different ranking processes. Since the results of the university classification and study programmes ranking were brought into question with the court decision, the link between these instruments and the funding methodology was not kept. Moreover, even if the law stipulated other forms of disbursing higher education funding, such as institutional development financing that were not influenced by the classification, the subsequent methodologies were not developed or implemented by the end of 2013.

In order to increase university autonomy and public responsibility, the law proposed that universities should establish their own mission, institutional development strategy, curricula design and implementation, quality assurance mechanisms, as well as financial and human resources management. Moreover, universities should be provided with financial incentives to establish start-ups and business incubators so as to encourage students and academics to develop their entrepreneurial skills. Even so, the universities still have to comply with other regulations that influence these actions, such as: the status of academic staff, which still includes provisions similar to those applicable to civil servants; complying with the standards from the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and with financial regulations for public funds.

Regarding the recruitment and pre-service training of students for a teacher career in pre-university education, the Law of Education aimed to promote specific facilities for encouraging the following of a teaching career in pre-university education by financing undergraduates applying for a master's degree in education. The development of such a master programme envisaged several components: theoretical development provided by special university accredited study programs; a two years master's degree in teaching; a practical teaching period for one year within an educational unit under the supervision of a teacher, with the role of a mentor.

By the end of 2013 the practices regarding the development of the teaching staff were not changed, as the "study programmes" for teachers remained the same, no master programme in teaching was developed and the implementation of these regulations were postponed.

When looking at the collegial leadership system of Romanian universities, the law introduced an alternative (more managerial in nature) and allowed academic communities to democratically choose what type of leadership they want. As a consequence, all Romanian universities chose the collegial leadership system.

Regarding the implementation of the *Student Centred Learning approach*, the law recognized that students are considered partners in the HEIs and equal members of the academic community and introduced a code of students' rights and responsibilities, proposed by the national students' associations and approved by Ministerial Decision, but at the same time, the participation of students in the process of electing the university rector was diminished.

Related to equity, new instruments were introduced in the law, aiming at increasing equitable access to higher education: a student loan system, addressing students coming from low-income families, a special fund for student inclusion, scholarships and students social protection, disbursed to universities based on a competition, as well as the legal possibility for universities to distribute the budgeted places on social criteria. However, the loan system is not currently in place. The lack of initial financial investment of the state, the small amounts of the loans set by the law, and the lack of debates in the academic community regarding its usefulness could be arguments for which the authors consider that this action is still not implemented. The specific fund has no allocation procedures adopted at the national level and has therefore never been distributed to universities. Regarding the new procedures for grants allocation, from the total number of public universities, fewer than five universities have already integrated in their procedure the allocation of grant on social criteria.

Looking at the development of the Romanian higher education since 2007, it is evident that a number of reforms were started, but some of them still need development of subsequent legal documents, based on coherent policies and sound research and impact assessments. The following section will underline the history of grounding national policies on various types of research and capacity building projects, as well as how international organisations or institutions played a role in this context.

3 Evidence-Based Decisions and Subsequent Legal Changes in the National Setting

As in any new democracy, capacity had to be built in the Romanian higher education sector after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. Apart from legal changes, state authorities and higher education institutions needed to build capacity for designing, implementing and assessing public policies, as well as for in-depth analysis and research to ground decision-making. Both national institutions and international bodies (such as the World Bank, the European Commission, UNESCO-CEPES) worked together to develop projects and analysis on which major policy changes were grounded and that also increased the ability of the system to implement agreed reforms.

The next section aims at introducing two case studies—one referring to an international organization, the World Bank, as well as its influence and contribution to higher education reform in Romania—and a second case study looking at the role of UEFISCDI, as a national actor that used pre-accession and structural EU funds to develop a body of knowledge and increase capacity in the Romanian higher education and research sectors.

3.1 The Role of the World Bank in Romanian Higher Education Reform

The World Bank has been actively following the evolution of Romania since the 1970s, when significant loans were granted to the Ceausescu regime. However, the World Bank has been mostly active as a lender in Romania since 1991; from the total of the World Bank's 30 projects in Romania, totalling around US$3 billion, around 21 projects, amounting to US$1 billion, were in operation in 2002. A US $300 million loan was negotiated by the Romanian authorities with the World Bank in 2002 (the Second Private Sector Adjustment Loan). The understanding was that Romania would: reform and privatise the financial sector, privatise state-owned enterprises, stimulate the business environment and cut the costs of the social sector (Ginsburg 2005).

In post-communist times, the World Bank's influence in the higher education sector started to be visible in 1991, when an external evaluation of the Romanian Education System, based on a Japanese grant, was conducted. Subsequently, a confidential report was presented and discussed in the Romanian Parliament in December 1992. The World Bank argued then for a more professional management of the higher education sector, for a restructuring of the financing system with a view of abolishing the idea of 'education free of charge' and for enhancing equity of the system by fostering access for 'talented, but needy students' (Romanian Parliament 2002–2005).

Based on a preparatory negotiation phase (1994–1995), the Reform of Higher Education and Research Project RO—4096 (1996–2002) was implemented by the Romanian Government.[5] The total budget amounted to USD 84 million, which came from three sources:

- a grant from the European Union in total amount of USD 9.6 million;
- a loan from the World Bank in total amount of USD 50 million;
- a Government contribution of USD 24.4 million.

Components II and III of this Project constituted a major strand of the Government strategy of developing higher education, and included three main areas of development:

- diversification of higher education system;
- introduction of new areas and developing the existing ones, according to the market economy demands;
- an increase in academic performance and the introduction of modern teaching and learning methods.

The project had, inter alia, the following aims: an increase of student expenditure in both public and private higher education provision, an increase of 25 % by 2000

[5] http://ro4096.uefiscsu.ro/

of private HE enrolment, an increase to at least 30 % of the total funding for recurrent expenditures of private financing by 1998/99 and an increase in cost recovery from students as a proportion of private financing in public higher education (World Bank 1996).

In light of the major impacts of this project over higher education in Romania, it was considered similar to a "Marshall Plan" for higher education in the 1990s (Damian 2011). The results of this large-scale reform project were already visible in 1999, when Romania signed the Bologna Declaration and started preparing to align its higher education system to the commitments made in the European Higher Education Area.

In view of the large-scale massification of higher education and the limited public resources to invest in this sector, which caused inequities in the system, in 2008, the World Bank developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education a report regarding the possibility to introduce a student loan scheme. This report included an analysis based on statistical data, as well as conclusions formulated following three rounds of discussions with approximately 140 participants in dedicated workshops. As a conclusion of this report, the expert team advised the creation of a loan scheme that would increase higher education accessibility, introduce co-sharing for both tuition and living costs and influence the behaviour of graduates, according to the interest of the Government. A number of more specific technical recommendations were also made. (World Bank and Ministry of Education, Research and Youth 2008) As a follow-up of the project, the student loan is foreseen in Law 1/2011 and an Agency for Student Loans and Scholarships was created, but currently the loan system is not functional.

Taking into account the brief description of the major initiatives developed in cooperation with the World Bank it is clear that, along with other important international players in higher education, the World Bank had a decisive influence on higher education reform In Romania. This influence was manifest in the last decades with a clear concentration in the 1990s, both in terms of diffusion of ideas, as well as regarding financial support and capacity building.

3.2 Strategic Projects for Higher Education: Providing Evidence for Decision-Makers

In addition to the influence of international players, the Romanian higher education system also developed by using the expertise and policy ownership given by various large scale projects. UEFISCDI was one of the public institutions intensely involved in enabling Romanian academic communities to participate in policy design and evaluation via a series of projects, supported by European funds.

In 2008, a year after Romania became a EU member, most of the European Social Fund—Operational Programmes for the 2007–2013 timeframe—were launched in accordance with the National Development Plan (Government of Romania 2005) and the National Strategic Reference Framework (Government of

Romania 2007). The vision of those programmes was to contribute to Romania becoming more competitive, dynamic and prosperous; they had the objective to reduce the economic and social development disparities between Romania and other EU Member States.

One of the Operational Programmes under the "Convergence Objective" was the "Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP-HRD)" with the general objective aiming at the development of human capital and increasing competitiveness, by linking education and lifelong learning with the labour market and ensuring increased opportunities for future participation on a modern, flexible and inclusive labour market for 1,650,000 people. The specific objectives included inter alia: promoting quality initial and continuous education and training, including higher education and research; promoting entrepreneurial culture and improving quality and productivity at work; facilitating access to education and to the labour market of the vulnerable groups.

As a result of these EU membership generated funding opportunities, the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) implemented eleven strategic projects aimed at providing support for the decision makers regarding the reform of the higher education system.

The first wave of projects implemented between 2008 and 2012 was based on the results of the previous projects that underlined the most relevant areas that needed further work, for example the projects developed in partnership with the World Bank, or funded through PHARE or TEMPUS EU funds.

These projects, and the projects that followed, created the premise for policy developments and shaped the debates on the higher education arena by: providing evidence based policy options through system-level analysis, creating an environment for debate with different stakeholders, international experts and decision makers, offering different perspectives for the future of the Romanian higher education system and by developing different instruments for the use of the academic community.

In particular, in one of the projects[6] a comprehensive analysis of Romanian higher education landscape was developed. Based on the project activities, a set of strategic documents were also developed, such as:

- a vision regarding the Romanian Higher Education in 2025 and a White Paper for Quality and Leadership in Romanian Higher Education in 2015, that offered a way forward when thinking about future policies (for example the importance of Student Centred Learning, university differentiation and excellence, transparency tools and data regarding HE);
- a Blueprint for Organizing Foresight in Universities for improving policy decisions;
- a report regarding the possible differentiation of universities;

[6] "Quality and Leadership for Romanian Higher Education: Charting the Future of our Society" Project - www.edu2025.ro

- a set of platforms that were meant to offer real instruments to all stakeholders in order to improve their activity.

University leadership was also targeted with these strategic projects. One of the key elements for increasing the ability of university leadership to enhance its strategic outlook was the construction and implementation of a system of adequate training for the universities representatives[7] with different decisional responsibilities (considered to be the first national policy that targeted university leaders).

In order for these activities to rely on realistic information, UEFISCDI developed the National Student Enrolment Registry[8] project, whose main goal was to conduct for the first time an analysis on data collection for higher education. A platform for the national student enrolment registry was developed and piloted. Additionally, a discussion on how data regarding students should be collected/used was started, which opened the path for further projects that aim at developing a unique data collection system for the higher education system.

In order to raise quality and relevance of higher education, an analysis was developed[9] to see the extent to which the acquired knowledge allows the graduates to be employed on the labour market, to develop their own business or to continue higher education studies at the next level.

A second wave of projects was considered an important instrument for assisting policy reforms in connection with the new law of education.

In that context, the projects "Quality and diversity in Romanian Universities"[10] and "Performance in the Romanian Higher Education"[11] were developed in connection with the national process of evaluating universities. Romanian higher education institutions were involved in a mutual learning experience with international quality assurance experts, in an exercise developed in partnership with the European University Association and its Institutional Evaluation Programme.

Another contribution to the implementation of the Education Law was the project "Quality Assurance in higher education through habilitation and audit",[12] which aimed at creating the methodological framework for the habilitation of professors (that involved the right to coordinate PhD students), the audit and evaluation of human resources.

A second structural funds type of programme that targeted higher education is the Operational Programme 'Administrative Capacity Development' 2007–2013, which had as an objective to contribute to the creation of a more efficient and effective public administration for the socio-economic benefit of Romanian society (Ministry Of Interior and Administrative Reform 2007) UEFISCDI is currently implementing under this operational programme a third wave of projects. The first

[7] "Improving University Management" - www.management-universitar.ro

[8] "The National Student Enrollment Registry" - www.rmu.ro

[9] "University Graduates and Labor Market: Romanian Tracer Study" - www.absolvent-univ.ro

[10] "Quality and diversity in Romanian Universities" - www.pe.forhe.ro

[11] "Performance in the Romanian Higher Education" - www.pc.forhe.ro

[12] "Quality Assurance in higher education thru habilitation and audit" - www.aer.forhe.ro

project, "Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania", on which the present research volume is based,[13] aims to increase the capacity of public administration for evidence-based policy making in the field of higher education. This project was mainly driven by the experience and expertise stemming from Romania's initiative to host the Bologna Secretariat in the 2010–2012 timeframe and to organise the Bucharest EHEA Ministerial Conference and Third Bologna Policy Forum.[14] Among the above mentioned project's main goals, we find an analysis of the current data flows in higher education between different institutions, which includes recommendations for the data collection system improvement and the development of an integrated online system of data collection aimed at replacing the current repeated flows. The project also included comprehensive studies regarding the implementation of the current policies within the Bologna Process, with a focus on equity, internationalization, and internal quality assurance and with detailed recommendations for these specific areas. Research articles and even full fledged publications have resulted from this project already or are forthcoming, such as a study regarding the implementation of the Bologna Action lines in the Romanian higher education landscape, to be published by CEU Press in 2014 and the present volume.

One of other projects that started in 2013 aims to prepare the necessary conditions for transition to the national e-Administration system, in order to create a more efficient and effective public administration for the social-economic benefit of the Romanian society. The other project stated in 2013 is aiming at increasing capacity for strategic planning of the Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) sector, to meet the short, medium and long term strategic needs of Romanian socio-economic development.

All these projects have been built on results of previous such initiatives and have tried to build on existing capacities, knowledge and to enhance the exchange of expertise with hundreds of external experts. The impact of these projects has been recognized either by members of the academic communities via capacity building indicators or by national authorities by including policy solutions suggested by various projects in national legislation or strategies.

3.3 Strategic Projects for Research and Innovation in the Higher Education Context

Looking at research and innovation in the Higher Education context, the influence of some strategic projects can be easily seen, as UEFISCDI apart from two projects aimed at the development of the third cycle and young researchers developed the

[13] "Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania" - www.politici-edu.ro

[14] http://www.ehea.info/news-details.aspx?ArticleId=102

only two national strategies: the strategy for research and innovation 2007–2013[15] and the National Strategy for Research, Technological Development and Innovation 2014–2020.[16]

Regarding higher education research, the 'Doctorate in universities of excellence' project[17] aimed to train young researchers from universities in view of developing, transferring and re-evaluating the scientific knowledge. Specific criteria, methodologies, indicators and a specialized online platform were developed and piloted in order to improve the quality of research in universities through proper evaluation. This project started national debates regarding the possibility of introducing excellence programmes in Romanian universities and tried to improve the editorial capacity of the Romanian ISI scientific publications.

Another project[18] also managed to develop a diagnosis regarding doctoral schools on thematic fields at the national level and proposed a new model of Doctoral Schools.

As a possible consequence, the future policies regarding the reform of the third cycle were also based on these findings and some of the key areas, such as the Romanian ISI scientific publication or research evaluations, have increased in quality and numbers.

Moreover, Romania assumed an active role at the European level by co-chairing the BFUG WG on the third cycle which aims at providing recommendations/policy proposals to the Education Ministers in areas such as: quality assurance, transparency tools, internationalization and mobility, employability and the third cycle.

4 Romania's Role in the International Context—Key-Player on the Rise?

Apart from being influenced by various international processes and actors, Romania also became increasingly visible in the international arena in the past decade. It assumed various roles as a country and representatives of higher education stakeholders were increasingly present in European level stakeholder organisations. This dimension is interesting to study, in order to capture how much of the national policy debates were simply downloaded from European or international arenas and how much Romania managed to 'upload' some of its policy priorities at European or international level.

Bucharest became the centre of higher education in Central and Eastern Europe with the set-up of UNESCO CEPES (European Centre for Higher Education) in September 1972, which aimed at promoting co-operation in higher education

[15] www.strategie-cdi.ro

[16] www.cdi2020.ro

[17] "Doctorate in Universities of Excellence" - www.ecs-univ.ro

[18] "Doctoral Studies in Romania: Organization of Doctoral Schools" - www.studii-doctorale.ro

among Member States of the Europe Region (the countries of Europe, North America, and Israel). The activities of UNESCO-CEPES were focused foremost on higher education in Central and Eastern Europe. In the timeframe September 2003–December 2010, UNESCO-CEPES has been a consultative member of a Follow-up Group of the Bologna Process.

UNESCO CEPES was tasked with undertaking projects relevant to the development and reform of higher education, especially in view of the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (1998) and the Bologna Process, as well as to provide consultancy, disseminate information, promote policy developments, act as a capacity builder before and especially after the 1989 revolutions, as well as act as co-secretariat of specialized networks, especially of those related to the implementation of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the Europe Region.

Due to the concentration of specialized staff and information in UNESCO CEPES, Romania was always connected and active to international developments. UNESCO CEPES was led by the current Secretary General of EUA, Lesley Wilson, who acted as Director of the Center between 1995 and 1999. In 2009, The Romanian Government hosted the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education in the Europe Region: Access, Values, Quality, and Competitiveness, which took place in Bucharest, Romania (22–24 May 2009). The meeting was co-organized by UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) and the Ministry of Education on behalf of the Government of Romania, and in collaboration with the Council of Europe, the European Commission, OECD, the European University Association (EUA), the European Students' Union (ESU) and Education International (EI) as well as the Observatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

The Forum reunited government officials, institutions of higher education, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and discussed trends and the further development of higher education foremost in the Europe Region (Europe, North America and Israel). The work of the Forum was based on the report entitled *Ten Years Back and Ten Years Forward: Developments and Trends in Higher Education in Europe Region* (Usher 2009) as well as thematic papers on four key topics—access, values, quality, and competitiveness, which were identified as being of strategic importance and regional relevance and which were prepared by top-level experts in the respective areas. In addition, the challenges of internationalization of higher education in a globalizing world were discussed as a transversal theme. The Forum concluded with the *Bucharest Message to the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education* (UNESCO 2009). The ideas reflected in this document were also found in the UNESCO WCHE+10 Communiqué to be adopted in July 2009 in Paris and reflected in the debates around different drafts of the Law on National Education (Law 1/2011).

Romania was also heavily involved in the policy negotiations prior to the adoption of the April 2012 EHEA Bucharest Communiqué, as the Vice-chair of the BFUG and the host of the Bologna Secretariat. Romania hosted the first Ministerial Conference in the 'consolidation' phase of the Bologna Process, as well as the third

Bologna Policy Forum, on 26–27 April 2012 where more than 70 ministerial delegations from around the world were present. In the run-up to the Ministerial Conference, Romania supported, inter alia, a set of key ideas which were prominent in the national environment and on which Law 1/2011 was based: more effective governance, transparency, university mission diversification and more diversified university financing. Romania also supported EUA in the push for more links between the EHEA and the European Research Area and proposed the set-up of a voluntary peer learning and review system across the EHEA that would provide an impetus for more exchange of good practice and experience between EHEA countries, but also between higher education institutions. If one looks at the precedence of the adoption of Law 1/2011 and at the persons involved in the BFUG negotiations, it is clear that Romania assumed a role of 'policy upload' of national priorities into European processes. Also, Romania opted for an innovative approach with regard to the management of the existing Bologna Process documents, by creating a permanent EHEA website[19] and an EHEA archive[20] that reunited all public documents since the inception of this longstanding Pan-European policy coordination process.

A further proof in that direction is the organisation in the context of the UEFISCDI structural projects, in October 2011, of the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference,[21] an event which gathered over 200 scholars from more than 30 countries looking at recent higher education policy reforms in general and the Bologna Process in particular. The results of this conference fed into the proceedings of the ministerial debates and materialized into a two volumes of research articles,[22] creating a link between researchers and policy. The General Rapporteur of the Researchers Conference, conveyed the key messages from the research community during the Bucharest Ministerial Meeting itself.

Romania is currently involved in all BFUG structures as a member and acts as a Co-Chair of the EHEA Working Group (WG) on the Third Cycle within the Bologna Process, together with Spain and Italy.

Since 2007, Romania is also part of all EU policy debates and is now working closely with the European Commission and the World Bank to design several strategies aimed at pinpointing the priorities for specific sectors, including higher education, lifelong learning and research. Also, currently Romania is an OECD observatory member. One specific example to illustrate Romania's role in recent European debates is the UEFISCDI initiative to publish a forthcoming research volume with an innovative character, which will provide both national overviews and specific case studies of mergers and alliances of higher education institutions over the last decade. This volume will follow in the series of research volumes on higher education trends started with the Bologna Researchers Conference.

[19] www.ehea.info

[20] http://archive.ehea.info/about

[21] http://fohe-bprc.forhe.ro/

[22] http://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-94-007-3937-6#section=1049193&page=1

It is also worth noting that Romanian representatives were active at the international level, as part of various leading Bodies of European level umbrella organisations such as the European University Association (EUA), the European Students' Union (ESU) and Education International (EI), the European Register for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EQAR) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). This presence amplifies the diffusions of European ideas in the Romanian policy context and enables the European policy processes to take into account issues present in the Romanian higher education sector.

Looking at the elements introduced in this section, it could be argued that Romania is in a definite transition from being a policy downloading country, which primarily exports international norms, to a policy upload actor that also make good use of international arenas to promote its national priorities, which can then in turn be used domestically. Also, it is clear that this strong involvement in supra-national policy arenas has benefited the internal capacity to formulate, implement and assess public policy, even if this needs to be complemented by other tools as well.

5 Conclusions

Romania has been remarkable in its rapid expansion of higher education opportunities and in the ability to mobilise international support for its reforms. From a country with a very restricted higher education sector in communist times, the country transformed into a full-fledged EU member with a higher education sector that includes 92 universities and more than half a million students. Naturally, inherent challenges apply. The present contribution brought forward the context supporting (or applying pressure to) higher education policy making in Romania in the past decades, with due consideration to the main instruments used for grounding policies on solid evidence, including needs assessments and on international good practices.

Even though policy makers have been making use of a variety of tools to ensure evidence based policymaking, Romanian realities reaffirm that the higher education community is in need of continuous debate and involvement on key areas of debate; no reform has a straightforward implementation without ownership of the sector. Moreover, political consensus needs to go beyond formalism. Education is not a sector that can be meaningfully reformed within an electoral cycle and a broad political consensus on the way forward is the only way to ensure legal stability and sustainable policies.

In a context in which the latest education law (Law 1/2011) is not fully implemented, with several pieces of secondary legislation and even amendments pending, the need for consultation and capacity building is greater than ever. In this sense, a key role has been played by large-scale national projects, which facilitate both implementation and the necessary preparation work for new policy making decisions. Similarly, institutional level projects are bound to provide funding and the organisational framework for an effective grass-roots implementation of

measures deemed important by both universities and national/European authorities. Mutual learning, peer assessment, exchanges of good practice have been proved effective in reducing resistance to change in an area of strategic importance, in which both globalization pressures and national priorities play an important role. Similarly, the experience of international organisations, such as the World Bank or EUA, benefited the system over the years in a way, which has been documented in previous chapters.

Naturally, large-scale European policy transformations, such as the Bologna Process, shaped Romanian higher education, by becoming 'the image of change'. Even though sometimes the legitimation of higher education reforms was rather negative—what would other European countries say if we would not do this or that—the Bologna Process had a definite impact on the Romanian policy landscape, especially since 2000. Romania's latest involvement in the steering of this pan-European initiative proves the interest of policy makers in the comparability of the national higher education with systems in other European countries, in international partnerships, while maintaining national specificity and a high level of competitiveness.

In order to better understand the effects of the reforms, if the influences of international organisations and processes, as well as those generated by the Romanian institutional arrangements, the following research articles will focus on themes such as equity in higher education, from various perspectives, internationalization and its effects on Romanian universities, student centred learning, the effectiveness of internal quality assurance mechanisms, student participation as a tool for ownership and sustainability and impact assessment of higher education policies. All authors have been involved in activities that involved desk research and consultations at both national and institutional level and have multiple backgrounds that ensure the diversity and originality of their views. Furthermore, the articles shed light on the innovative research findings within the projects.

As a final remark and as it always happens, there is a lot of commitment to deepen research and embark on new initiatives for furthering the higher education policy work in Romania. This volume, providing food for thought for both practitioners and researchers, is part of a series started with the 'European Higher Education at the Crossroads: Between the Bologna Process and national reforms' volume, and will surely continue with other initiatives aimed at improving the body of knowledge on Romanian higher education available for the international research community.

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The Role of Impact Evaluation in Evidence-Based HE Policy Making: The Contribution of Transparency Tools

Lucian Ciolan, Mihai Păunescu, Ciprian Fartuşnic, Romiţă Iucu and Călin Hintea

Keywords Evidence-based policies · Ex-ante impact evaluation · Transparency tools · Higher education ranking

1 The Need for Informed Higher Education Policies

The articulation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and related policy processes has brought into attention a series of challenging "transition" paradoxes, mainly to the strategic steering of higher education systems and institutions, but also to the key actors in this field. High among them are the following:

- From the elite to the massification of education and training;
- From the local/regional approach to the global approach;
- From the use of mainly governmental funds to attracting private investments;
- From collegial management/steering to corporate management/steering;
- From national to cross-national standards;

L. Ciolan (✉) · R. Iucu
University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: lucian.ciolan@gmail.com

R. Iucu
e-mail: romiuc@yahoo.com; iucu@unibuc.eu

M. Păunescu
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: paunescu.mihai@gmail.com

C. Fartuşnic
Institute of Educational Sciences, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: cipf@ise.ro

C. Hintea
Babes-Bolyay University, Cluj Napoca, Romania
e-mail: hintea@fspac.ro

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- From regional to international mobility;
- From national cultural frameworks to cultural diversification;
- From accreditation to quality enhancement mechanisms—trust, transparency, impact;

Starting from the last point above, namely the need for trust, transparency and impact assessment, we will try to illustrate the role and function of transparency tools (with a specific case-study) in the new conceptual picture and social mission of higher education in Romania.

In the following chapter we will undertake an ex-ante analysis of the implementation of one tool (U-Multirank) in Romania, as an example of a relevant policy that aims to address the information asymmetry at the level of the higher education sector. The U-Map sets to develop a more elaborated and versatile model through which institutional performance can be measured and compared, and also a series of new indicators, considered as being more appropriate and valid to capture the perspectives of beneficiaries by the authors of this approach. Our analysis is therefore a contribution to the current debate regarding the tools for impact assessments at system level, suppliers, professional practice and student and other direct/indirect beneficiaries level and their role in assuring a higher transparency and information symmetry (Hazelkorn 2012; Usher and Jarvey 2010; Van Vught and Ziegele 2011). The aim of the chapter is to identify the policy measures that best address a set of external criteria that refer to the scope, the impact, the depth and the associated costs of the intervention. We will approach this ex-ante impact analysis by estimating the advantages and disadvantages of each of the policy options identified, based on the secondary analysis of the existing data. In the end we will propose a policy measure that best addresses the transparency issues given the criteria that we set.

Higher education represents a set of institutions through which high-level qualifications are provided following professional and academic training processes (Witte 2006; Maasen and Stensaker 2011). This set includes educational suppliers (higher education institutions), stakeholders (students, academic staff, parents, employers etc.), regulatory and supervisory organisations (the ministry, consultative committees, quality assurance agencies etc.), regulations, social rules and practices. Higher education is organised similarly to a market, in a broad sense of the word, a market in which educational services suppliers offer study programs at various levels (bachelor, masters, doctorate) to current students and potential beneficiaries. The market runs mostly on the principle of demand and supply. The state is an important social stakeholder which plays a key role in the transactions between various actors (suppliers, clients, beneficiaries) in order to correct the dysfunctions caused by market imperfections. Government interventions are made through educational policies in the higher education sector (Curaj et al. 2012; Păunescu et al. 2011). The need for these policies is justified by the following core reasons:

(1) Higher education is a public (or partially public) good or it exhibits the features of such a good. The benefits of higher education are non-exclusive, since they spill over to the society at large and do not only affect the direct

beneficiaries (graduates, their families). The development of the human capital is crucial for an economy, allowing its organizations to recruit highly qualified workforce. Therefore it plays an essential role in attracting capital investments and economically developing the society as a whole. In addition, the innovation and the technological progress facilitated by the universities are beneficial to the society in general. The development of citizenship through the higher education study programs also has a positive impact on the democratic functioning of a nation. As it does produce a lot of positive externalities (the benefits go beyond those who pay the direct costs for its provision), it displays the features of a public good, higher education tends to be produced and delivered at suboptimal levels, entailing that generally higher levels of provisions and consumption would pay the additional costs. This leads to state intervention through public policies in order to increase participation or consumption (measured, for example, through transition rates from secondary to tertiary education, higher education enrollment rate; the percentage of degree holders in the 30–34 years age group, etc.) or to enhance the quality of the results and the scope of impact (graduation rates, labor market insertion rates). Public policies in higher education generally pursue such objectives, aiming at raising the overall participation in the sector, as well as the effectiveness of the educational sector (Vlăsceanu et al. 2011).

(2) Secondly, at the level of the higher education sector, there is an information asymmetry between providers and beneficiaries of educational services, which leads to systemic distortions of the market. Student choices are distorted because of the lack of standardized and comparable information on the higher education providers. Students most often rely on surrogate information such as peers' choices or family guidance. This situation is actually to the advantage of education providers. The lack of state or other type of regulations indirectly encourages higher education suppliers to publish only the favorable pieces of information that drives their competitive advantage or to process and analyse the data to their own advantage. A certain degree of approximation can be found in all these types of information, since it does not always reflect the quality of a study programme/supplier. Consequently, decisions are made without relevant information and inefficient social services do not easily find their way out of the market (Hazelkorn, 2011; Păunescu et al. 2012).

State intervention through public policies enforces a certain standardization of the information provided by the higher education suppliers in order to make it usable and comparable. Transparency tools such as the multi-dimensional higher education institutions classification (U-Map) or the multi-dimensional ranking (U-Multirank) are examples of recent policies assisting future students by enabling evidence-based individual decisions. Seen from a public policy perspective, the use of these tools contributes also to three important dimensions/functions (Ciolan et al. 2009):

- The accountability function, responsible for determining the quality of the public policy and for accountability to beneficiaries and financiers, which have to be informed in regard to any intervention performance and impact;

- The management function, which provides early warnings, solutions and recommendations for the continuous improvement of the public policy during its implementation; impact management is an adaptive approach that is aware of the contextual factors that influence success;
- The learning and developing function, which refers to the institutional capacity to capitalise on the successes and failures of an intervention in order to perform better in that same intervention and especially in future similar ones.

2 U-Multirank as a Transparency Policy—a Case Study on the Romanian Higher Education Sector

2.1 Context

U-Multirank is a recently developed transparency tool that aims at producing rankings of European higher education institutions and beyond, both in terms of overall institutional characteristics and also specific rankings on fields of study. U-Multirank is intended as a user-centered tool, democratic, abandoning the principle of alleged, implicit, epistemic authority in alternative, unitary rankings. Other important principles that stand at the basis of this model are: avoiding simplistic league-tables, wide applicability, approach based on empirical data, involvement of multiple stakeholders in providing information and tracking several dimensions, robust scale and special attention given to collecting additional data. All the activities are based on the voluntary decision of universities to be part of this exercise. It is expected that the first results on the multi-criteria classification of 500 higher education institutions, as well as the study fields of mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, business administration and physics, will be published in 2014. In the following years U-Multirank is planned to be progressively extended in what concerns the number of institutions and fields of study. For example, sociology, psychology, social work, computer science and music will be introduced in the ranking process by 2015.

The basic assumption from which this transparency tool begins is that there is no universal definition of quality in higher education on the basis of which to build a unique methodology for ranking. Conversely, higher education fulfills multiple functions for different stakeholders and therefore requires a multidimensional assessment to empower stakeholders in producing different rankings, according to their areas of interest. Classic rankings give arbitrary weights to different performance assessment criteria (generally giving substantial weight to research) and produce composite scores based on which they can generate unique rankings. The problem with this approach is that by aggregating the scores obtained on various indicators arbitrarily weighted, reductionist and artificial results are produced. Furthermore, such rankings are often irrelevant for different categories of stakeholders that do not pursue excellence in research, but rather in the quality of

teaching, in the relations with the external environment, community engagement, etc.

In the case of U-Multirank, the dimensions/criteria taken into account when generating hierarchies, besides the classical one regarding research, are teaching, knowledge transfer, international orientation and community/regional commitment. Based on these, multiple rankings can be generated, taking into account the interests and values of the user of the resulted classification.

U-Multirank starts from a comprehensive definition of higher education. The general characteristic of higher education and research institutions is the processing of knowledge (Clark 1983; Becher and Kogan 1992). These institutions are engaged in different ways, in breakthrough efforts, in the development, conservation, transmission and application of knowledge (Clark 1983). On the other hand, U-Multirank assumes both vertical and horizontal institutional diversity corresponding to different levels of quality of educational services provided (which also corresponds to different educational levels), as well as to various institutional profiles in accordance with institutionally assumed missions and also to different audiences of higher education institutions. With regard to quality measurement of the provided services, the U-Multirank project includes indicators regarding the institutional capacity of higher education institutions, so-called input indicators but also the articulation of processes for knowledge building and transfer, as well as the short, medium and long term results (impact). Furthermore, there are indicators regarding different higher education institutions capacities and different missions like: education, research and knowledge transfer. Also, some indicators refer to objective, quantifiable data regarding inputs, processes and results, while other indicator categories refer to subjective aspects such as opinions, perceptions and attitudes of beneficiaries or other interested stakeholders.

In the following we will try to make an ex-ante assessment of U-Multirank as a transparency tool addressed to Romanian stakeholders.. We will thus approach this ex-ante impact analysis by estimating the advantages and disadvantages of each of the policy options identified against a set of a priori criteria. The evaluation will be based on the secondary analysis of the existing data at the higher education sector level.

2.2 An Ex-ante Assessment Case-Study for the Introduction of a Transparency Tool

U-Multirank is a public policy initiative aimed at reducing or eliminating the information asymmetry offered by different providers and needed by various stakeholders (beneficiaries/founders of higher education services). An ex-ante analysis must start from defining the problem that the proposed public policy is meant to address. The questions the analysis has to answer at this stage are:

1. What are the nature and the scope of the problem that the public policy aims to address?
2. Who are the stakeholders involved and directly affected by this problem (organizations, institutions, individuals)?
3. Which are the main types of options, scenarios and measures that should be considered?

All these questions will be approached and analyzed below.

1. Analyzing the need for a transparency policy in the Romanian landscape of higher education, the identified problem refers to the lack of valid, standardized and comprehensive data which will enable different stakeholder categories to make multidimensional comparisons based on specific aspects of higher education. Higher education is not a commodity that users can evaluate a priori (for example based on competitive prices). Higher education is an 'experiential' service (Nelson 1970): users can evaluate the quality of the service provided only after they have 'experienced' it, but this type of 'experience' is an ex-post knowledge. Other authors consider that not even the learning experience is sufficient for a correct evaluation of the service provided. Dulleck and Kerschbamer (2006) consider that the value of the service provided becomes clear only after graduation (or even long after) depending on how the gained competences improved the graduates work and social status. However the most important characteristic of the evaluation of higher education services is its' multidimensionality and the difficulty of weighting indicators/dimensions according to the various needs of different users/beneficiaries. Different categories of stakeholders need specific information to enable informed decision-making processes. Prospective students and their parents might be interested in the global performance of universities in education, employability of graduates from a particular field of study, study conditions etc., thus aiming at choosing a specific supplier for educational services. The state or other financing organizations might be interested in the overall performance of universities, as well as knowledge transfer and the social value of research in choosing the most effective public investment. The different nature of the goals pursued by different stakeholders requires for relevance valid and specific data, collected in a strandardized manner that allows relevant comparisons. The problem is thus the lack of a set of comprehensive, standardized and valid data for the different dimensions of higher education, both for the institutions and the study programmes, that would allow both transversal and longitudinal comparisons between programmes as well as institutions, relevant for different types of stakeholders.

2. There are different categories of stakeholders that might have interests in a public policy on transparency of information regarding higher education institutions. On the one hand, institutional stakeholders as the state, employers, evaluation and quality certification agencies and consultative councils of the ministry are interested in the development and consolidation of comprehensive multi-annual databases on which to fundament different types of public policies for higher education. On the other hand, higher education institutions themselves can benefit from longitudinal comparative data as well as transversal data collection would

allow setting of benchmarks against which to compare their own performance in order to improve the services offered. Finally, beneficiaries, individual stakeholders, students, parents and also organizational stakeholders and employers need information regarding learning outcomes and higher education impact in terms of employability, the exploitation of competences and skills on the labor market etc.

3. The option types or various policy scenarios vary depending on the nature and the level of the public intervention. In what concerns the nature of the intervention, in solving a problem there are at least two possibilities: public intervention or non-intervention and the self-regulation of the higher education system itself. When the second case is preferred, one starts from the assumption (if not empirically demonstrated) that the public objectives set out and pursued by public policies at system level can actually be better achieved following the stakeholders' individual choices (individuals or organizations) without state intervention. This option starts from the assumption that the market offers enough incentives for higher education institutions to publish information about their own performance, while the beneficiaries/financiers have the capacity to identify, select and analyze the information available in order to make rational decisions. Equally, the higher education institutions could also identify a common interest and therefore be able to cooperate by initiating and sustaining a collective action without state intervention (for example establishing a common methodology for reporting results or establishing their own benchmarking system). In both cases, public intervention would become obsolete (and probably also harmful by distorting the market incentives) as long as the competition conditions or the cooperative social capital of organizations in that sector provide sufficient incentives and guidance for universities to publish relevant pieces of information. It is further assumed that beneficiaries can easily access and use this information at a low cost. In this case, the intervention can be minimal by encouraging universities to publish certain pieces of information, offering data presentation recommendations, facilitating exchanges of good-practice examples on ensuring transparency or supporting collective actions—self-regulations between higher education institutions. However, the intensity of public intervention could vary on a continuum having as milestones the following:

- Major intervention—using several tools of intervention, taking many public objectives, highly institutionalized means of achieving objectives, restricting individual choices;
- Moderate intervention—intervention tools that guide individual options through sanctions and rewards, assuming a certain degree of self-regulation, incremental policy change according to the evolution of the expected and unexpected consequences of policy implementation;
- Minor intervention—soft tools of intervention, based on informing stakeholders and facilitating collective action (for self-regulation purposes).

In what concerns the level of intervention, it can be local, state or supranational.

2.3 Current Situation. Baseline Scenario

The current situation in Romania is that of moderate, multiple public interventions, both at state and supranational levels, oftenly perceived as being poorly coordinated and most often redundant interventions. Different stakeholders, usually public authority bodies, have imposed different data collection mechanisms which are mandatory for most higher education institutions and create a lot of strain on them, as they differ from other methods used for reporting to different bodies. This is easy to observe as there are different mandatory methodologies for data collection: a) the legal provisions on the financing of higher education have produced informational flows managed by the National Council for Higher Education Financing (CNFIS) together with the Ministry of Education; b) the national education reports that are in line with the Eurostat methodological requirements are managed by the National Institute of Statistics (INS). The Law no. 87/2006 approving the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/12.07.2005 regarding the higher education quality assurance establishes the principle of internal and external evaluation of the quality of institutions and study programs using its own taxonomy of criteria, standards and indicators. The institutional and programme data are managed by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) that has also the legal power to propose to the Ministry the accreditation or non-accreditation of an institution or a study programme. In addition, following the provisions regarding the university classification and study programs ranking mentioned by the National Law of Education no. 1/2011, the new national assessment exercise for classification and ranking was established, its' methodology being approved by the Government Decision No. 789/10.08.2011.

The situation is characterized by a marked lack of coordination of the various data collection initiatives regarding the higher education system. The UEFISCDI analysis regarding the various information flows in the Romanian higher education system mentions (pp. 3–5):

Currently there is no integrated information system that can produce a unitary data collection and generate useful data in basing higher education public policies. Moreover, there are several reporting and data collection exercises at the national level (from higher education institutions) for the same type of data only that they request presenting it in different formats or machetes. This endeavor squanders resource and is time consuming for all the stakeholders involved. […] Data collections are systemically done (at intervals clearly defined in time), on one hand by The Ministry of Education through the General Department for Higher Education (DGIS) in collaboration with CNFIS—UEFISCDI and, on the other hand, by the National Institute of Statistics (INS). Other institutions either make periodic data collection on their own depending on their legal provisions (the National Research Authority, UEFISCDI—National Council for Scientific Research-CNCS for research centers), or do not directly collect data, but make use of the ones which are already public being published by the National Institute of Statistics in its publications (for instance the Institute for Educational Sciences).

In conclusion, we can state that the comparability of data collected through different methodologies is very low and most often than not the availability of primary data for generating of customized reports suited for the needs of different users is nonexistent. Data collection methodologies often change over time depending on the specific criteria from the financing methodologies (for example, the evolution of quality indicators for the allocation of the competitive primary financing). This leads to the lack of comparable data regarding the dynamics of some specific aspects of higher education institutions.

In addition to central authority agencies requiring data on higher education institutions, another data source is represented by the self-evaluation reports (both institutional reports and, respectively, study programmes reports) that the higher education institutions must submit to the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), before the Agency's external evaluation, for accreditation and/or mandatory periodic evaluation purposes. In this context, quality assurance also performs the function of a transparency tool, enforcing the accountability for education providers and offering interested stakeholders with reliable information validated by an external evaluation agency. The collected data are both objective—measurable performance indicators and subjective—the results of peer review evaluations. The problem with this data is that the information presented is either, descriptive and little comparable, or in many cases only the evaluation results are publicly available, but not the data that lead to the evaluation agency's decision. Most often than not, the evaluation results are poorly differentiated, most institutions being accredited by ARACIS and awarded with a 'high confidence' label; thus, there is little vertical differentiation and, to the extent it is, it is only one-dimensional (ultimately generating a single-ranking of institutions and/or study programs). Furthermore, as shown in the Quality Barometers published by ARACIS (Vlăsceanu et al. 2010; Paunescu et al. 2011) internal quality assurance is mostly a ritualistic and conformist process, often decoupled from the university management processes. Data reliability is, in this case, reduced. In addition, the autonomous and independent use of the disclosed information by various individual/organizational stakeholders is limited to the conclusions/evaluation reports of various assessment exercises. The primary data is often unavailable in usable and user-friendly forms in order to generate customized reports in accordance with the need of information and relevant, specific criteria of different stakeholders' categories.

The data collected during the national exercise for university classification and study programs ranking were gathered in 2011 only and were, to a limited extent, public as aggregate higher education institutional reports. Users did not have any possibility of autonomous data management for relevant comparisons, based on their own criteria. The data collected were processed through a national methodology approved by Ministry Order no. 5.212/2011 which reflects a certain vision on higher education (centered mostly on research) and resulted in a single ranking by providing weights and aggregating indicators specific to different dimensions. Eventually, the ranking is single-dimensional and reflects a particular view of higher education, mostly centred on research; while this could be beneficial for

producing a vertical differentiation, it severely limits the horizontal differentiation. However, the most important shortcoming remains the narrow autonomy of users in selecting and using the data in order o generate customized comparisons that are relevant for the respective user's criteria. The public nature of the data collected is also affected by the lack of availability of an online tool with a simple interface through which data of interest to each individual user can be accessed and processed.

2.4 Setting of Policy Objectives

The objectives of public intervention on increasing transparency, reducing the information gaps on the higher education market and consequently increasing the public confidence in the higher education services are as follows:

O1. Setting of a comprehensive and standardized data set with relevance for the performance of higher education institutions and the study programs they offer;

O2. Enabling cross comparisons (between institutions at a specific moment) and longitudinal comparisons (between different moments in time regarding the evolution of the same institution/program and its characteristics) that capture the relative quality of the services provided;

O3. Increasing the autonomy of various stakeholder categories in higher education data usage and making relevant reports, according to their own informational interests.

2.5 Option/Scenario Identification

The current situation/baseline scenario is sub-optimal in several respects. On the one hand, it is characterized by a persistent informational asymmetry between users and beneficiaries of educational services. On the other hand, the inflation of informational flows puts a lot of strain on higher education institutions due to the multiple and, in the same time, redundant reporting requests; these are also time and resource consuming and eventually lead to a sub-optimal data usage. Data that cannot be compared and used in various assessment exercises because of the incompatible methodologies and collection methods used.

There can thus be various scenarios that address in different ways the objectives mentioned above. The public policy options for the achievement of the above stated public objectives would be:

1. Integrating the existing informational flows into a single centralized consistent process through which to collect the data requested in both primary legislation (quality assurance, education law) as well as secondary legislation (norms associated with the financing methodology, EUROSTAT methodology). In this

scenario the information would also be centrally processed and unitary institutional and study programmes reports would be generated. The state will assume the role of data collector and processor and would standardize specific type of reports by replacing them with a unique framework that collects data useful to various stakeholders, usually agencies and public bodies.

2. Standardizing the mandatory institutional reports of higher education suppliers; the reports are actually mandatory as requested by the Law of National Education no. 1/2011, but this scenario will further elaborate secondary norms imposing the form, type of information and of data to be submitted regularly by each education provider. It will thus force the suppliers of education services to publish regularly a precise set of data (as defined by the norm) and not as a freely written report as it is happening. This will conduct to a standardized set of institutional reports that would comparable both transversal and longitudinal.
3. Carrying on with the national evaluation exercise for university classification and ranking of study programs. In this scenario a novelty would be the integration of collected data (at least some parts of them) into an accessible database through an online tool that can generate customized reports, according to user information needs. The centralized classification and ranking exercise could thus become transparent for all users' categories.
4. Improving the ARACIS external evaluation methodology for higher education institutions and programs/fields of university studies in order to increase the relevance of self-evaluation reports (for example through the continuous development and adaptation of benchmarks). In this scenario, the self-evaluation reports would likely become more reliable and richer in useful information and comparable data and would be usable by various stakeholder categories;
5. Assuming the implementation of U-Multirank at the national level by encouraging the higher education institutions to participate in the European project. In this scenario, the policy objectives would be followed by assuming and streamlining a European project, generating types of data and procedures that are comparable and compatible at European level.
6. Assuming the mandatory participation of all Romanian higher education institutions in U-Multirank. This scenario will enforce a European initiative through national authority and will foresee institutional penalties for failure to comply.

The above options are clearly not mutually exclusive. Some of these can be implemented at the same time, but they have different advantages and disadvantages associated with various stakeholders´ categories. On the other hand, the nature of the intervention differs as well as its level: options 1 and 6 represent major interventions, options 2 and 3 represent moderate interventions and options 4 and 5 represent minimal interventions. Options 1 to 4 are formulated at the national level while options 5 and 6 are formulated at the supranational level.

2.6 Options Analysis

The following option analysis will be conducted by taking into account the following criteria:

- the scope: degree to which various stakeholders' needs are included and addressed;
- the impact regarding the fulfillment of the assumed policy objectives;
- the type of intervention: the criteria of proportionality and subsidiarity—when the objectives of the public intervention are achieved equally effective, minimal or moderate interventions are preferred to major ones, more intrusive and restrictive of the individual liberty; also, the principle of subsidiarity requires that the intervention level should be kept to a minimum providing the effective achievement of the policy objectives;
- the balance between the main costs and benefits associated with various stakeholder categories.

Option 1 effectively addresses objectives 1 and 2, but does less in the case of objective 3—the autonomy of various stakeholder categories in using data and generating reports relevant to their informational interests. The scope or degree of stakeholders' coverage is limited to institutional actors that use data to elaborate public policies, the option being less relevant to students, future beneficiaries and parents. Also, being a major public intervention (centralized and enforced by authority), it is less preferred to others that fulfill the same objectives. Individual stakeholder costs are greater because they have to identify the relevant information in the various standardized reports for the public agencies/authorities and consequently to compare the information from different sources. However, the advantages arise from the increased validity and increased amount of the data verified by national authorities and consequently the public confidence.

Option 2 is the moderate version of the above option. Reports, as transparency tools, are made public by the institutions themselves, but are susceptible to data manipulation from institutional stakeholders. Also, the costs associated to generating relevant data by the information users are high because of the individual researching efforts to find and further process the available data. The advantages come from the establishment and effective usage of institutional reports as transparency tools, the enhanced institutional responsibility and fostering of a quality culture at the level of higher education providers, the increased communication and direct information paths between suppliers and beneficiaries of educational services.

Option 3 is beneficial both for the institutional users (funding or evaluation agencies) and for the individual users due to the online interface that allows data selection and generation of meaningful comparisons, relevant to the specific interests of each user. There is a high scope (degree of coverage) due to the fact that all the institutions take part in the exercise while data access and availability is guaranteed by a user-friendly interface. Data access could be made different according to each user's category. The disadvantages are related to the fact that the

specific national methodology of the classification/ranking exercise does not always allow the comparison of Romanian institutions/study programs with their European or international counterparts. At the same time, such a measure implies the risk of formalizing and ritualizing the reports and even data manipulation in the context of a lack of rigorous control; on the other hand, controlling and verifying the reports implies significant costs for the evaluating agencies. It may also discourage the emergence of a true quality culture as the standards, indicators, processes and procedures are imposed from top-down. Alternatively, the previous option (option 2) as well as the next option (option 4) encourages universities and the other providers to take ownership of the reporting process and the quality assurance mechanisms.

Option 4 leads to increased institutional autonomy and public responsibility of higher education providers, also fulfilling the quality enhancement function. Besides achieving social information functions, the collected data will also be relevant to the specific missions of each higher education institution (through their own choice of a set of relevant indicators for their assumed objectives/missions, in addition to a minimal set of mandatory indicators for all types of providers). The disadvantages consist in the high costs experienced by stakeholders in the selection and analysis of specific data; there can actually be information barriers for the stakeholders that are not experienced in the documentation of various sources and data analysis. This option is more appropriate as an effective quality enhancement tool for providers, but less as a transparency tool for beneficiaries—this function is fulfilled rather indirectly through the high validity of the data reported by the universities and through the increased trust between providers and beneficiaries. This option also fosters the emergence of sustainable quality cultures within the educational providers.

Option 5 meets all the policy objectives set; it is also a moderate intervention. The scope or degree of coverage can however be limited to the universities/study programs that decide to participate in the European project. It is also an option that yields long-term benefits: only after a critical mass of institutions and study programs participate in the project, the tool becomes effective for appropriately informing the potential beneficiaries. Also, only following the large-scale inclusion of providers and programmes in this project, the self-regulatory mechanisms at the field level become effective through the high image costs incurred by the non-participant institutions and programmes. The disadvantages consist in the excessive standardization of certain indicators and lack of flexibility in the design of alternative indicators. Also, the lack of data required by the national authorities in the design of public policies (the methodology and types of indicators are set out at the level of the U-Multirank project without consulting the national authorities) is also a disadvantage.

Option 6 also meets all the objectives set, but being at the same time a major intervention method that could take to a faster achievement of objectives; this comes with the cost of limited institutional liberty. On the other hand, U-Multirank design philosophy is centered on the voluntary participation of higher education institutions. Mandatory provision in the national legislation would lead to a

disproportionate and excessive measure with regard to the other European higher education institutions participating in the project. In addition, such a measure implies the risk of formalizing reports and even data manipulation associated with if not properly enforced by control specific to a major intervention. Such a control would not be appropriate for the philosophy of the project.

On the other hand, given the specific context of the higher education market in Romania, both option 5 and option 6 may lead to a limited impact as concerns the student choices regarding the education suppliers/services offered. Bachelor students' mobility in Romania is relatively low according to the study The university graduates and labor market recently conducted by UEFISCDI. The majority of students (66.5 %) do not choose to travel to a different study region from the region in which they passed the Baccalaureate; this fact points out that the main criteria in choosing an education supplier is still that of residence proximity rather than any other reason. The impact of the measure could be more significant only for the minority of students (33.5 %) that chose to migrate to another region (0.3 % to another country) to attend the courses of a faculty/university. The percentage of students who chose an international mobility is insignificant, and that actually points out a very low need for an international transparency tool. On the other hand, a transparency tool that includes higher education institutions from abroad can provide comparative information to foster greater future mobility, both national and international. However, this advantage is weakened by the fact that the actual undergraduate mobility is quite low as it can be seen from the table below. The data presented below represents a transversal view of the graduates of 2009. The dynamics may suffer changes, also fostered by the information made available by a comprehensive transparency tool, but at this stage it gives an image of the level of students mobility in Romania (Table 1).

Table 1 Mobility of Romanian students

Mobility before studies: the place where the baccalaureate exam was taken—the place of graduation				
	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Same city	11919	30.3	31.3	31.3
Same county	6249	15.9	16.4	47.7
Same region	7107	18.1	18.7	66.4
Romania	12649	32.2	33.2	99.7
Other countries	129	0.3	0.3	100.0
Total	38053	96.8	100.0	
Non-responses	191	0.5		
Total	1255	3.2		
Total	39308	100.0		

Source UEFISCDI Database—National study for labor force insertion of higher education graduates

Concluding, options 2, 4 and 5 build on the assumption of more responsibility of higher education institutions and also assume the capacity for self-governance of the sector if the state intervention provides the push and the conditions for collective action. Conversely, options 1, 3 and 6 are more centralized and assume a more active and paternalistic role of the state in its relation to the higher education institutions. Options 2, 4 and 5 could be implemented at the same time as these are complementing each other, but there needs to be consistency in the policy implementation as the main benefits will only be visible on the long-term. The development of a sector-owned benchmarking system and the emergence of a true quality culture enhancing the institutional responsibility will be the main positive achievements on the long run.

3 Conclusions

From the beneficiaries' perspective, U Multirank seems to directly answer their requirements/needs to have at ease relevant valid data and to make informed decisions. These tools prove to be effective in assisting prospective students to select their academic path and decide between different higher education institutions offers, contributing to a broad movement for a greater transparency and accountability (Hazelkorn 2012).

Mainstreaming the use of transparency tools for Romanian higher education system faces however various challenges, as indicated by our analysis of possible scenarios. The table below highlights some of the main advantages of accountability and transparency tools, with specific examples of challenges, from institutional-administrative, academic, social and financial perspective.

Moreover, as suggested by Miroiu (2010), "Romanian higher education currently exhibits a variety of internal differences. Yet there are, at the same time, strong incentives towards the homogenization of existing HEIs on several dimensions. To the extent to which institutional diversity is desirable, one must first define the dimensions of diversification while avoiding, at the same time, absolute dimensions or the reduction of the entire process to a single type of diversification. The public policies which may be advanced and then implemented by the authorities have a number of available instruments to reach their objectives. Each of these instruments has its specific virtues and drawbacks and any efficient policy application able to limit the range and impact of unintended consequences must consider them"

Various transparency and accountability tools in higher education system were developed in recent years, in particular related to accreditation, quality assurance and national ranking for resource allocation. However, the state was the main driver of these developments, universities having so far limited initiatives and experiences of independent use outside specific public policies. Having the comparison of characteristics and uses of transparency instruments as a reference (Hazelkorn 2011), benchmarking seems to be, in particular, underdeveloped and could offer universities a space for cooperation in the near future.

Table 2 Examples of the advantages and risks of implementing accountability and transparency tools in Romania

Criteria	Advantages	Challenges
Institutional-administrative	A more rigorous substantiation of institutional development strategies and annual or multi-annual operational plans	Additional resources (human, material) allocated for data collection and database development
Academic	Multi-criteria comparison of academic performance	Providing internal expertise for data verification, indicator calculation and indicator interpretation/analysis The lack of confidence in the accuracy, completeness and up to date characteristic of basic data for the calculation of different indices
Social	Transparency towards stakeholders, providing information that assists the individual decisions of beneficiaries	The weak assessment culture and the ”fear” of publishing various databases
Financial	A more realistic picture of the quality of service provided in relation to costs. The possibility to define a more realistic reference standard in relation to the performance of other universities	Additional costs that need to be included in the annual budget of the institution. The difficulty of justifying the inclusion of these costs in the current funding formula (from the state budget)

At institutional level, benchmarking added value is linked with the instrument capacity of using institutional comparisons processes for assisting strategic decisions and with the voluntary dimension of the approach. It provides a framework both for systematic comparison of practices and performances with peer institutions and for systematic cooperation in specific areas, based on mutual needs and interests.

The current context provides a good opportunity for a wide use of this instrument, since both educational authorities and universities themselves are still in search for effective and efficient transparency and comparative approaches, formats and mechanisms. It could directly contribute to enhance quality, performance and competitiveness and also create a community of practice of institutions jointly sharing data, best practice, peer-to-peer development and mentoring (Labi 2011; Hazelkorn 2011). As a bottom-up process and not a top to down, it could lead to the creation of a group of peer institutions that, at a later stage could be the main drivers of mainstreaming accountability and transparency tools within higher education system.

This approach could be particularly relevant in Romania, where for the last decades the policy process was ‘suppressed’ by the uncontested dominance of regulatory tools and very diffuse presence of real impact assessments. Impact evaluation and the availability/use of transparency tools on a large scale could enhance the evaluative culture in higher education institutions, stimulate decision-makers towards more evidence-based processes and bridge this missing link of the between policy process stages and actors, namely evaluation.

The international scene offer insightful examples on how trustworthy data exchange directly impact the strategic decision-making and promote innovative tools for boosting initiatives for higher education modernisation and competitiveness (i.e. example of the Canadian universities partnership). U-multirank demonstrates the wide area that could form the basis of the cooperation, guided by the diversity of higher education missions and activities and is fully compatible with this approach. As one of the core design principles is the peer-group comparability whereby higher education institutions of similar mission are looked at together, benchmarking could offer a concrete framework for Romanian universities to accurately diagnose bottlenecks and fundamental restructure in a continuous improvement process.

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Why Do Romanian Universities Fail to Internalize Quality Assurance?

Koen Geven, Oana Sârbu, Robert Santa, Adina Maricuţ and Norbert Sabic

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1 Introduction

In response to laments about administrative burdens and 'reform fatigue', many university leaders have called for a prioritization of 'internal quality assurance' over 'external quality control'.[1] Already since 2003, the European University Associa-

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K. Geven (✉)
European University Institute, Florence, Italy
e-mail: koen.geven@eui.eu

O. Sârbu
ARACIS, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: oana.sarbu@aracis.ro

R. Santa
Institute of Education, London, England
e-mail: robi.santa@gmail.com

A. Maricuţ · N. Sabic
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
e-mail: maricut_adina@ceu-budapest.edu

N. Sabic
e-mail: norbert.sabic@gmail.com

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tion (EUA) has promoted "a coherent quality assurance (QA) policy for Europe, based on the belief: that institutional autonomy creates and requires responsibility, that universities are responsible for developing internal quality cultures and that progress at European level involving all stakeholders is a necessary next step" (EUA 2003, 9). Indeed, it would be strange if universities would not take this responsibility, "since quality management, at least theoretically, can have potential academic benefits" (Pratasavitskayaa and Stensaker 2010, 3).

Underlying this idea is an implicit assumption that QA is in the best interest of universities because it fosters the development of procedures and mechanisms meant to ensure that "quality, however defined and measured, is delivered" to the stakeholders (Harvey and Green 1993, 19). By setting up QA processes, universities would show the larger public that quality in general and quality improvement in particular is an ongoing concern for the governance of higher education institutions. Moreover, individual academics would continuously try to improve their scientific work and teaching, in line with the needs of employers and students.

In this light, an interesting empirical question is to ask why most universities—and indeed most professionals in higher education—do not internalize quality assurance. In fact, we can find quite a lot of resistance against this practice, both in the academic literature and in practice (Apple 2005; Ball 2003). In Romania, the topic has caught the attention of some scholarly debate, as universities are generally considered to fail to internalize quality assurance (Păunescu et al. 2012). The present paper asks why this is the case; in other words: why do Romanian universities not internalize quality assurance?

We address the question by drawing up five different hypotheses as to why quality assurance is not internalized in Romanian universities. The hypotheses are taken from the public policy literature as well as the literature on post-communist transitions. They are then tested on empirical data consisting of national policy documents on quality assurance and 187 semi-structured interviews with around 327 people (managers, faculty members, administrators and students) in 5 universities. After an analysis of the evidence, we argue that there are top-down problems with the internalization of quality assurance, caused by ambiguous and inconsistent national regulations focused on multilayered evaluation procedures. At the same time, problems arise from the interpretation of quality assurance at lower levels of decision-making. These hypotheses are then used to construct a narrative of why Romanian universities fail to internalize quality assurance.

The paper proceeds as follows. It starts with a short background of the history of QA in Romanian higher education, with an emphasis on difficulties encountered. In order to explain problems in the internalization of QA, we then provide some conceptual clarifications on the notion of 'quality assurance' and the differences between its 'internal' and 'external' variants. Next, we advance five hypotheses for the failure to internalize QA in Romanian higher education institutions. After presenting our research design, we put forward the analysis of our empirical data and discuss its implications.

2 Internal Quality Assurance in Romanian Universities—a Mere Formality?

In the Romanian higher education system, QA exists as such since 2005, when the government passed an Emergency Ordinance to comply with the 'European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher Education' (2005). Before this date, the idea of quality management was limited to the accreditation of higher education institutions, regulated since 1993 in order to tackle the mushrooming of the private sector—a common phenomenon in post-communist countries (Scott 2002). Throughout the 1990s, a National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEEA) was appointed by the Ministry of Education to run the accreditation process, and focused on staffing, infrastructure, management and administration capacities (Păunescu et al. 2012, 317). The 2005 legislation created a new autonomous public institution—the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)—that took over the accreditation process and was entrusted with responsibilities in the authorization of study programs and external quality assurance more broadly. The law explicitly distinguished internal from external quality assurance, and specific provisions focused on external evaluations —defined as "multi-criteria examinations of the extent to which a higher education institution fulfills the reference standards" (Emergency Ordinance 75/2005, Art 3 [2]). Accordingly, quality was to be 'assured' through "a set of activities meant to develop the capacity of universities to elaborate, plan and implement study programs, thus gaining beneficiaries' trust that the institution is maintaining quality standards" (Ibid, Art 3[3]). More importantly however, external quality assurance was linked with the accreditation of universities, upon which ARACIS was to decide.

Since universities depended on ARACIS for their legal survival, they formally complied with external requirements for quality assurance without necessarily developing systems of their own (Vlăsceanu et al. 2011, 25). As a result, universities failed to consider internal quality assurance (IQA) as a managerial instrument meant to enhance the quality of education (Păunescu et al. 2011, 30–31); instead, they viewed it as an auxiliary bureaucratic procedure mentioned in the organizational chart but separated from the daily activities of teaching and learning in the university. In the absence of a "local culture of quality" (Vlăsceanu et al. 2011, 26), IQA was just another 'empty-shell' institution imported into the Romanian higher education landscape, which came to be implemented without substantive effects.

But if QA were to have 'substantive effects' at the level of universities, how would they look like? The next section reflects on this issue from a theoretical perspective.

3 Conceptual Notes on 'Quality Assurance'

From an analytical point of view, we suggest that the problem with the lack of substantive effects in the implementation of quality assurance stems from the fact that universities only focus on 'compliance' with the rules imposed by QA policy, without identifying with or believing in the underlying ideas behind it. More specifically, academics in Romanian universities—for whatever reasons—do not internalize the various policies and norms entailed in QA. Indeed, if all Romanian academics would believe in the necessity of QA-related evaluation practices, we would probably not be discussing this particular policy problem.[2] The present section expands on the issue of 'internalization' by explaining our understanding of 'quality assurance' and the normative connotations behind it.

What we mean with the concept of quality assurance is *a variety of techniques tasked with the evaluation of higher education and research with the purpose of improving its quality. These practices have in common that they place a normative appeal on 'continuous self-improvement' and 'stakeholder communication', embedded in procedures that are subject to inspection by peers and/or professional evaluators*. The concept thus includes, among others, institutional evaluations, the accreditation of study programs, or even league tables made by governmental bodies. However, it probably does not cover managerial attitudes with a different normative appeal (such as loyalty to superiors, or cut-throat competition with peers) or evaluations of specific professional 'products' rather than the professional as such (e.g. peer review in academic publishing). Nevertheless, it is perhaps not so easy to draw clear boundaries around the technical and normative aspects of QA. The concept has been controversial as to how it can best be adapted to higher education, culminating in a variety of different approaches and terms. We thus see a mushrooming of words like 'audits', 'evaluations', 'reviews' and 'accreditations' and a myriad of acronyms like 'ESG', 'ISO', 'EFQM', 'PDCA-cycles' or 'TQM'[3]—each denoting different techniques of 'doing QA' as well as different people involved in this practice.

While many debate the differences between these instruments, we think it is important to analyze the shared ways of thinking *behind* them, their common procedures and the interaction between their various forms. In this sense, we aim to analyze the phenomenon that has sometimes been referred to as an 'audit culture' (Shore and Wright 1999; Strathern 2000) or even an 'audit society' (Power 1997).

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[2] Unless, of course, these policies would produce some unintended consequences. In that case, we would probably turn around the question and ask why the academics are so eager to internalize the policies.

[3] These acronyms do not cover up any clear meaning. 'ESG' is used to denote the 'European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area'; 'EFQM' stands for 'European Foundation for Quality Management' an organization that has promoted a so-called 'Excellence-model' of quality assurance; 'PDCA-Cycle' stands for 'Plan-Do-Check-Act-Cycle'; Finally, 'TQM' stands for 'Total Quality Management'.

Analyzing the shared way of thinking behind these instruments is important, because some common conceptual distinctions may not be as easy as they seem. The distinction between 'Internal Quality Assurance' and 'External Quality Assurance' is one chief example. The literature often makes this distinction, whereby:

> Internal quality assurance refers to those policies and practices whereby academic institutions themselves monitor and improve the quality of their education provision, while external quality assurance refers to supra-institutional policies and practices whereby the quality of higher education institutions and programs is assured (Dill and Beerkens 2010, 4).

This distinction is relevant because one of the key reference documents, the 'European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance', places the main responsibility for QA on the shoulders of 'higher education institutions' (ENQA 2005). Indeed, the main policy documents in Romanian higher education make the same distinction.[4] But is it so easy to separate the 'internal' from the 'external'? The professional scholar, student or departmental coordinator can consider both types of quality assurance as 'external'. Inspectors with a mandate from the 'state' or from the 'rector' may be equally insensitive to departmental standards and practices. More importantly perhaps, both 'external' and 'internal' QA are the object of public policy. Indeed, it is the purpose of much 'external' QA to analyze the functioning of the 'internal' QA system. In other words, it is important to question whether 'internal' and 'external' can be disentangled so easily.

A second—and related—conceptual distinction is often made between quality assurance for 'accountability' and for 'improvement', respectively. While the former notion emphasizes the control aspect of QA, the second emphasizes the reflexive aspect (Bovens 2010). While this may seem a useful conceptual line, the border is also hard to draw in practice. Even the hardest forms of control are often justified through the language of improvement (Shore and Wright 1999). Therefore, the relevant question to ask is: 'accountability' and 'improvement' *for whom*? A specific change in teaching and learning methodology may be considered as an improvement by the government, and at the same time as regress by professionals, or vice versa.

In sum, then, the theoretical discussion on quality assurance requires us to unpack distinctions and analyze what they mean for those involved in its various practices. The following section will continue this discussion and propose various reasons why Romanian universities do not internalize quality assurance.

[4] This is at least the case for Emergency Ordinance 75/2005, the ARACIS Methodology, and Law 01/2011 on Education. These three texts can be considered as the reference texts on quality assurance in Romanian higher education.

Table 1 A schematic overview over the hypotheses regarding the internalization of quality assurance in Romanian universities

No.	Hypothesis
H_1	Quality assurance is not internalized because of academic 'complacency'
H_2	Quality assurance is not internalized because of ambiguous and inconsistent national regulations
H_3	Quality assurance is not internalized because it lacks support from people 'on the ground'
H_4	Quality assurance is not internalized because of institutional (communist) legacies from the past
H_5	Quality assurance is not internalized because the market does not reward its operation

4 Hypotheses on the Failure to Internalize Quality Assurance

We present five possible hypotheses as to why quality assurance is not internalized in Romanian higher education. The hypotheses are derived from public debates on higher education as well as from public policy frameworks and political science literature applicable to higher education. They are best understood as complementary to each other, even if there may be some apparent contradictions between them. The following table gives a schematic overview over our hypotheses. Although we probably cannot disprove any of them, we believe that the likelihood of each hypothesis can be reduced if we do not find any empirical evidence to support it. Each hypothesis is discussed in more detail below with reference to what type of empirical material we expect to find (Table 1).

4.1 The Problem of Academic 'Complacency'

The most straightforward explanation why quality assurance is not internalized is because actors in universities do not see its purpose, since they are content with what they are doing in terms of quality. The reasoning behind this argument exhibits a form of academic 'complacency': people believe that they are good at what they do, and as a result they do not think they need quality assurance (whether external or internal). For instance, ARACIS considers that one of the main weaknesses of QA in Romania is that "higher education institutions still remain too 'self-laudatory' instead of showing an understanding of the role of self-criticism concepts for QA and the quality enhancement activities" (ARACIS Self-Evaluation Report 2013, p. 46).

Hypothesis 1: *Quality assurance is not internalized because of academic 'complacency'.*

If this hypothesis holds empirical value, we should find that people in universities are often self-praising about their activities while seldom reflecting critically

about themselves, their colleagues, or their university. Acknowledging weaknesses is perceived as wrong or even 'unethical', especially if it relates to the activities of others.

4.2 Top-Down Policy Failure

If the problem does not originate from complacency, then the failure to internalize quality assurance might originate from the policies themselves. Top-down approaches in implementation studies view the policy process as a linear model wherein policy-makers specify straightforward policy objectives which are then put into practice at lower levels (Palumbo and Calista 1990). The underlying assumption is that actors at the top can control what happens in the implementation chain (Elmore 1978; Mazmanian and Sabatier 1989). By implication, policy failure can occur when central-level guidelines are not clear and consistent enough for implementers to follow (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975).

Hypothesis 2: *Quality assurance is not internalized because of ambiguous and inconsistent national regulations.*

If this hypothesis is correct, we expect to find that people in universities regard national frameworks on quality assurance as overregulated, difficult to disentangle for the purposes of implementation and changing too fast for them to have the necessary time to adjust.

4.3 Bottom-up Policy Failure

A different, yet complementary perspective comes from the bottom-up approach in implementation studies, which argues that policy results are ultimately dependent on target populations and local deliverers (Berman 1978; Lipsky 1980; Matland 1995, 148–150). Accordingly, the success of a policy does not lie at the macro level with the framing of legal requirements (which of course provide certain structures of incentives), but at the micro level—where implementing actors need to be asked about their problems, goals and activities in order to identify relevant policies and ways to implement them (Hjern et al. 1978).

Hypothesis 3: *Quality assurance is not internalized because it lacks support from people 'on the ground'.*

If this hypothesis is accurate, then we should find discordance between the narratives at central level and those of actors inside universities. Importantly, we should encounter actors in institutions who (at the very least) express skepticism about the content and necessity of QA-related evaluation practices, suggesting that national policies have little legitimacy or relevance on the ground.

4.4 Problems in Overcoming 'Legacies from the Past'

A prominent narrative in the transition literature in political science is that of 'communist legacies', which generally prevent people from adapting to new approaches and mindsets (Kopstein 2003). In its more popularized form, this 'legacy' is a sort of vicious circle, with people distrusting each other, while the state is not able or willing to engage with new institutional forms. In its more serious form, 'legacy' is taken as a sociological type of institutional 'path-dependence' (Thelen and Steinmo 1992; Mahoney 2000) which deems the policy process as incremental and overall resistant to change (Hall and Taylor 1996, 941). Bruszt and Stark (1998), for instance, emphasize that the post-communist transition in Eastern Europe consists of institutional innovations, although these are both enabled and constrained by earlier political choices. In this sense, failure to absorb the new institutional set-up is a function of both past failures and faulty design.

Hypothesis 4: *Quality assurance is not internalized because of institutional (communist) legacies from the past.*

If such 'path-dependence' exists, we should find dominant institutional forms from the past that continue to influence actors today. In particular, we should find that academics refer to either formal or informal institutions with a long history that are still prevalent in the university. We should find that these institutions and historical practices stand in competition or simply overshadow the implementation of QA.

4.5 Logic of the Market for Higher Education

In contrast to theoretical frameworks focused on path-dependence stands a well-known theory that emphasizes the logic of the market. Not only did post-socialist countries democratize, but some also imported a specific type of capitalism, namely neo-liberalism (Bohle and Greskovits 2012). Already in earlier discussions, some scholars highlighted that new market arrangements could erase both old structures and attempts at new institutional forms (Burawoy 2001). Although the market is also a typical institution that is subject to path-dependence, we think it warrants a separate hypothesis. The difference with 'path-dependence' is that the market is not so much a 'past-dependence', as a 'future-dependence' which influences operations in the present based on the actors' cost-benefit analysis (ibid).

Consequently, the market may both inhibit and encourage quality assurance practices depending on the individual preferences of actors (i.e. higher education institutions, students, professors, employers, etc.). On the one hand, the market may value less traditional academic standards of quality, while rewarding only the qualifications of graduates, which can lead to the cheap milling of diplomas. On the other hand, since the concept of quality management was pioneered in industry, the market may encourage a constant concern with quality assurance. Since we are

concerned with answering why QA is *not* internalized, we will only discuss the former interpretation of the argument.

Hypothesis 5: *Quality assurance is not internalized because the market does not reward its operation.*

If this hypothesis holds empirical value, we expect to find that members of the university community do not perceive the market to reward quality assurance[5]. Moreover, the internalization of QA should be perceived by these same actors as 'not worth the time and money'. Instead, their perception would be that the market rewards other type of activities, like popular study programs with little substance.

Having outlined the possible explanations for the failure to internalize QA in Romanian universities, the next sections move to presenting the data and the main findings. Before that, some elements of research design are introduced.

5 Research Design

From a methodological standpoint, our research follows in the tradition of interpretive policy analysis, exploring both discourses and the effects of ideas on practices (Fischer and Forester 1993; Finlayson et al. 2004). Within this framework, the purpose was to understand how actors in universities engage with quality assurance in terms of activities, effects and meanings associated with it (Milliken 1999). To this end, we examined three dimensions: (a) what is being done at the university/faculty level under the heading 'Quality Assurance'; (b) what these activities lead to, and (c) how actors relate to this process.

In order to investigate how people "make sense of their lived experiences" (Yanow 2007, 410) with quality assurance, we used two primary methods - namely *interviews* and *document analysis*. Five field visits were carried out between December 2012 and May 2013 to a representative sample[6] of universities: the West University of Timisoara (UVT), the Babes Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (UBB), the Gheorghe Asachi Technical University (TUI) in Iasi, the Romanian American University (RAU) in Bucharest and the Lucian Blaga University (LBU) in Sibiu. During the visits (which followed a standard template), we conducted 187

[5] Of course, it is also possible that the market rewards a specific type of QA. In this case, we would expect to find that actors in universities will use it strategically to respond to market needs.

[6] The sample ensured geographical variation, as well as variation between different types of university profiles (comprehensive/technical) and sizes (large universities with over 20,000 students, and smaller universities with less than 10,000 students). A private university (RAU) was included in the sample in order to avoid an overemphasis on public universities. For individual interviews, faculty members and students were selected by the administration of universities. Although this process was probably not entirely random, care was taken to visit as many faculties as possible (usually 2–4 faculties with various departments). This selection had a predictable effect —those who were selected being more likely to have internalized QA more strongly, or at least to be more aware of discussions on the topic. In other words, the findings will probably have a positive bias (Dillman et al. 2009).

semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of the university population - including management in rectorates and faculties, QA commissions and departments, individual professors, and students (327 people in total). All interviews were transcribed, allowing for a structured analysis of transcripts. We then constructed a database on quality assurance in Romania, consisting of national-level policy documents in conjunction with documents originating from universities (institutional reports on QA) and the interview data. Each document was analyzed with a similar coding procedure used in the computer program 'Atlas.TI'.[7] Inter-code reliability was ensured through a shared list of codes and mutual evaluations of coding practices. The coded material was later examined in light of the alternative hypotheses proposed. The findings are presented in the next section.

6 Findings

Table 2 below presents a concise summary of our findings. As shown in the table, hypotheses 2 and 3 were confirmed by the evidence gathered, while we did not find any support for hypotheses 1, 4 and 5.

The empirical evidence thus goes against some of the dominant explanations for why universities fail to internalize quality assurance. Although we cannot definitely reject hypotheses 1, 4 and 5, we have not found enough empirical material to support them. In fact, when it comes to hypothesis 1, we often encountered the opposite situation: rather than being complacent, most interviewees manifested insecurity about their professional status and awareness of the gaps in their 'scientific' work, coupled with an evident desire for self-improvement. In a similar vein - in relation to hypotheses 4 and 5 - we discovered that quality assurance is not directly inhibited by 'communist legacies', but instead seems to be encouraged by market mechanisms. Indeed, the university that was most dependent on the market (the private one) had strongly internalized the improvement values associated with quality assurance.

Clearly, there is no single mechanism at play that prevents QA from being internalized in Romanian universities. The two hypotheses confirmed by empirical evidence are thus complementary rather than mutually exclusive—as such, we will aim to construct a narrative in which hypotheses 2 and 3 provide a 'full story' of the reasons why QA is not internalized. *The heart of the problem, according to our data, lies in the nature of policy-making in Romanian higher education—which fails in both its top-down and bottom-up dimensions.* On the one hand, policy failure originates from unclear and inconsistent legal provisions that only result in a bewildering array of evaluation procedures and administrative structures considered burdening by actors in universities. On the other hand, policy failure derives from

[7] This coding process, as well as the resulting database is available (in anonymized form) for further research upon written request to the researchers.

Table 2 An overview over the hypotheses proposed and their empirical validation

No.	Hypothesis	Supported by evidence?	Justification
H_1	Quality assurance is not internalized because of academic 'complacency'	NO	While there were a few isolated cases of complacency, most interviewees were well aware of problems facing their professional lives and the weaknesses of their university. In fact, most interviewees would be interested in improving the quality of their work
H_2	Quality assurance is not internalized because of ambiguous and inconsistent national regulations	YES	The legislation and the ARACIS methodology are seen by members of the university community to regulate too many activities without actually addressing teaching and learning in any substantive way. Moreover, the policy context was described by our interviewees as highly unstable and inconsistent, creating more problems than solutions for those working in universities
H_3	Quality assurance is not internalized because it lacks support from people 'on the ground'	YES	Actors in universities often consider QA regulations as divorced from problems 'on the ground'. Simultaneously, the multiple evaluation procedures are questioned by many actors in universities in terms of both content and necessity. Some people manifested a need for a bottom-up debate as to what QA should entail
H_4	Quality assurance is not internalized because of institutional (communist) legacies from the past	NO	There have been no references to Romania's communist legacy as an inhibitor of QA reforms. Neither have there been any such references to ARACIS' predecessor CNEEA. When mention was given of 'history', it usually referred to QA projects before 2005 in the absence of legislation
H_5	Quality assurance is not internalized because the market does not reward its operation	NO	On the contrary, the market is often seen by members of the university community as a chief driver for QA-related activities. This was particularly so for the private university case. But even public universities increasingly started to link QA to their ability to remain competitive on the higher education market in the context of a declining number of students

the exclusion of lower-level actors from decision-making on QA policy; as a result, these actors feel no ownership over their IQA systems. On the contrary, they regard quality assurance as a tool of the government, imposed from above, with the purpose to control universities through various reporting mechanisms. As a form of passive dissent, they comply with QA requirements in a ritualistic manner - which is why the process fails to produce substantive quality enhancements.

Based on an initial analysis of empirical evidence for each hypothesis in turn, we constructed a narrative[8] as to why Romanian universities fail to internalize QA. In line with hypotheses 2 and 3, we present the 'story' below.

6.1 Top-Down Problems

The account starts at the macro level, with the design of national policies on quality assurance and higher education more broadly. Probably the most serious problem of the Romanian higher education system, as resulting from our data, comes from the unstable policy environment—higher education policies change very frequently, and so do procedures to ensure quality. Universities do not have a consistent set of rules to follow on QA and other activities in general, which creates confusion (since it is difficult to keep up-to-date with the latest legislative modifications) and prevents them from engaging in long-term planning. While the law on quality assurance has remained more or less in place since 2005, there have been many subsequent legal changes following the 2011 law on education, the classification exercise and associated legislation related to the evaluation of research centers (UEFISCDI 2010). Each of these changes has led to a build-up of frustrations about quality assurance and its supposed remedies among many academics. As expressed by one professor:

> Regulations are constantly changing and it is hard to follow up on them. Some of the regulations are not coherent. We are constantly on stand-by. This creates confusion and we cannot plan for the future. (Decision-Maker, Professor, Female, NS0302).

The back-and-forth with the national classification system, whose legal status remains unclear[9], was an oft-cited example of policy instability affecting the implementation chain. Specific to internal quality assurance, recent legislation

[8] In interpretive policy analysis, narratives are stories "participants are disposed to tell about policy situations" (Fischer and Forester 1993, 11) in an attempt to make sense of a socially constructed world. They play a key role in problem definition, providing "a view of what has to be done and what the expected consequences will be" (Fischer 2003, 161).

[9] The hierarchization of study programs, whose legal basis lies in Ministerial Order no. 4174/13.05.2011, was a controversial measure introduced to classify higher education institutions in Romania according to teaching and research capacities and subsequently determine their financing. The funding effects of the classification were overturned by Emergency Ordinance 21/2012 and a university in Suceava even won an appeal case against the Ministry on the matter (2013). The classification as such still stands legal, without implications for financing.

obliged universities to separate QA commissions operating under the rector from curriculum and quality commissions at the Senate level, which was criticized by implementing actors as overlapping and counterproductive because they are sometimes doing the same thing (Decision-Maker,[10] Professor, Male, AM0102).

Since neither the law nor the methodology specifies the boundaries of QA, people tend to understand it according to their own agenda. For instance, managers at faculty level would often link QA with the enforcement of sanctions on their employees. In the absence of flexible labor legislation, some university managers claimed that they would like to use staff evaluations for command-and-control purposes, e.g. to fire people (Decision-Maker, Professor, Male, AM0203). While QA may very well have the role to keep track of professors' teaching and research activities, it can probably not substitute legal requirements on proper academic conduct. IQA may be the wrong tool to prevent violations of professional standards such as academic corruption, unmotivated absence from classes or defiance of basic student rights. This is where labor and even criminal law is supposed to come into effect. As one interviewee put it:

> We have moved from quality evaluation to quality control - this does not mean quality improvement exactly (Decision-Maker, Professor, Male, AM0202).

In addition, the legal framework on QA is not straightforward to implement. For example, the ARACIS methodology emphasizes the production of documents outlining procedures rather than substantive performance indicators on teaching and learning. As one interviewee noticed:

> Many of the things discussed on QA at ARACIS or the university level are empty of any content. For example, there is little in the way of ARACIS criteria that checks if teaching is suitable and relevant for the departments concerned. There is also little in the way of checking what actually happens in the classroom. It is important to check facts, not paper reports (Decision-Maker, Professor, Female, RS0802).

Although the legislation aims for the enhancement of quality by reference to numerous 'standards' and 'procedures', it is far from clear what they are supposed to achieve in terms of teaching and learning outcomes. Moreover, since universities rarely have QA-trained people to understand and apply the technical language from the national level, it is hard for them to identify with QA activities.

Another macro-level problem refers to the requirement to establish several administrative structures layered on top of each other. Typically, an institution would have at university level a QA department (DMC) and a QA commission (University-CEAC)—both operating under the supervision of a vice-rector responsible for quality management. These structures are complemented by a department on scientific research (under the supervision of another vice-rector) and

[10] In our coding, 'Decision-Makers' include: rectors, vice-rectors, deans, vice-dean, heads of department, senate members, senate/university-level CEAC; 'Administrators' are people working in Quality Assurance Departments or Faculty-level CEACs; 'Professors/Associate Professors/Lecturers/Assistant Professors' are academics not holding any hierarchical or QA-related position, whereas 'Students' can be undergraduate or postgraduate (both MA and PhD).

a Senate commission on curriculum and quality. At faculty level, there are quality assurance and evaluation commissions (Faculty-CEAC), usually headed by the dean or a vice-dean tasked with quality management. Within departments, specific people are sometimes appointed as QA responsible, but usually the tasks fall under the role of department heads. While all these structures are theoretically part of an integrated system, the relationship between them does not seem entirely clear to many interviewees. Usually, the Quality Assurance Department is the most active structure at university level, but the degree to which QA procedures are organized and followed up at faculty level is largely dependent on individual managerial initiatives.

Owing to such complex institutional structures, there is a tendency to multiply procedures that are not always needed. Does the Senate really have to be involved in evaluating programs before ARACIS visits? Do faculties and departments really have to operationalize the strategic plan each year, and produce a report on their activities? There is a lot of frustration about the level of bureaucratization involved in running the IQA system:

> [We need] to stop working twice for the same thing. Why do I need to have a faculty report and a QA report? Are they not the same thing? Why do we need two different reports and formats? (Decision-Maker, Professor, Male, RS0503).
>
> Time management needs to become better. We are wasting a lot of time on useless things" (Decision-Maker, Lecturer, Male, KG0705).
>
> The QA process is characterized by huge quantities of bureaucratic requirements. We are lucky that the Vice-Dean for Quality Management takes care of these documents" (Decision-Maker, Professor, Male, RS0604).

So far, the narrative presented reflects top-down aspects of the problems to internalize quality assurance. *But our data shows that even if the national regulations would have been perfectly clear and consistent, they may not have been applied on the ground.* There are significant bottom-up elements to consider, and they are presented next.

6.2 Bottom-up Problems

Most significantly, our data suggests that members of the university community do not feel ownership over their IQA systems. Since there are direct links between external evaluations and the legal survival of universities, respondents seem to understand IQA as preparation for external inspection rather than internal reflection on teaching and learning:

> The QA system was only created in response to the law and ARACIS requirements - there is no point to hide this fact (Decision-Maker, Associate Professor, Male, AM1201).
>
> We are forced by all these different institutions, ARACIS, EUA, to do such evaluations (Decision-Maker, Professor, Male, AM0202).

This understanding highlights that IQA is implemented mainly to comply with the law and governmental regulations rather than to actually improve institutional quality. In this sense, QA is viewed as something imposed from the outside, through procedures meant to artificially create a 'quality culture'. But since the focus is on reporting (externally), the IQA system is regarded as a tool of government designed to control universities by invoking the argument of accountability —which is perceived especially by university and faculty management as infringing upon university autonomy. Further in the implementation chain, there is no wonder that people react strategically:

> We were even told from the university level: you do what you think is best, and don't take the self-evaluation too seriously (Associate Professor, Male, AM0502).

Accordingly, people passively try to subvert this tool of government by carrying it out in a ritualistic fashion while hiding what they are really doing. Instead of open contestation, there is a sort of resignation and task avoidance, which is why QA cannot become internalized. For instance, most respondents believe that evaluation criteria are imposed from above by policy-makers with little experience in running a university:

> The system is designed by bureaucrats who have never been in a university. Now this system meets the everyday reality of people who try to cope (Lecturer, Male, NS0902).

> Universities need to be autonomous. (…) they need to be free to set their own path to excellence rather than being constrained by excessive regulation from the central level (Decision-Maker, Associate Professor, Female, RS0105).

Many problems are derived from here. One interviewee referred to the difficulty to comply with the recently-imposed research standards, given both the lack of resources (e.g. access to international databases) and expertise to conduct research at a European level. The unintended effect was that research quality probably decreased as a result:

> [Research indicators] have asked us to become 'writing machines'. Books are written like this (snaps fingers) without reflecting on what should be written (Administrator, Assistant Professor, Female, KG0905).

> I take information from students diploma projects. I give them some research to do, and I maybe get some papers from the research. It is maybe not so good, but both the student and I gain from this. (Associate Professor, Male, KG0503)

Simultaneously, assessment procedures do not account for differences between disciplines and fields of research. For example, in technical fields manuals are in great demand because of the fast-changing nature of the disciplines; however, their production is not counted as research (Decision-Maker, Associate Professor, Male, AM1003).

Moreover, QA procedures are often perceived as disconnected from the actual problems and goals universities have:

> QA is not related to the improvement of quality: there has never been a bottom-up debate on what it should entail (Postgraduate Student, Male, AM0701).

For the average academic, QA has little utility in generating any type of change unless there is a personal desire for self-improvement. Without the connection between QA procedures and quality improvement, many academics see the QA process as purposeless and only taking important time from their teaching and research activities:

> I was tormented years in a row by all this paperwork [for ARACIS evaluations]; when should you have time for research when you have all these additional tasks? (Lecturer, Male, AM1301).

In the language of the bottom-up implementation literature, this discussion can be summarized by claiming that local implementers (individual academics) do not see IQA as responding to their institutional needs and goals, their understandings of quality and how this should be achieved. Although there are individual exceptions, IQA thus fails to produce the quality improvements stated as objective.

7 Conclusion and Discussion

Despite being wrapped in a technical, enhancement-driven discourse, the discussion on the internalization of quality assurance is in fact as multifaceted as it is politically sensitive. This paper has demonstrated that there is no straightforward way to understand why actors in universities fail to routinize QA practices in their activities and subsequently use them to generate quality improvements, since the mechanisms at play are manifold. The analysis of the Romanian case has shown that problems revolve around the process of policy-making, with underlying causes at both the macro level (top-down failure) and the micro level (bottom-up failure). Indeed, the inconsistency and ambiguity of national regulations—not linked to teaching and learning in any substantive way - determine actors in universities to feel burdened by QA and confused as to how they should implement and make use of its activities. Moreover, there is some discordance between central-level narratives focused on quality enhancement and accountability and those of actors in universities, who generally feel no ownership over their IQA systems and fail to see the purpose of the multiple evaluation procedures. Therefore, actors on the ground reject QA practices as unnecessary and infringing upon university autonomy, which is why they subsequently perform them in a superficial manner—as a form of passive dissent. In the end, there can be no talk of improving QA processes in the Romanian higher education system without direct involvement and support from the people for whom they are effectively designed.

In light of the conceptual clarifications presented earlier in this paper, our findings may appear less surprising. Undeniably, it is difficult to separate the ‘internal’ from the ‘external’ when it comes to quality assurance. Academics are inclined to perceive all evaluations as ‘external’, regardless if they are conducted by governmental agencies/international bodies or their own institutions. At the same time, professional evaluators may miss the specificities of individual departments

and disciplines, touching upon the sensitivities of local actors who thus become less open to move beyond ritualistic compliance with QA requirements. The issue hence returns to the second conceptual element mentioned, namely *for whom* is QA supposed to produce 'accountability' and 'improvement'? For individual academics in the universities that we visited, the answer is 'not for us'. On the contrary, the government is seen as the main beneficiary of all evaluation procedures, followed perhaps by the university management to a lesser extent. As long as they don't see it in their best interest, actors in universities have no motivation to internalize quality assurance—which as a result fails to deliver on the promised quality enhancement objective.

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Equity from an Institutional Perspective in the Romanian Higher Education System

Jamil Salmi, Cezar Mihai Hâj and Daniela Alexe

Keywords Higher education policy · Equity promotion policy · Equity · Scholarship system · Merit-based and need-based scholarships · Under-represented groups · Student dorms · Tuition fees · Social services

List of Abbreviations

NIS	National Institute for Statistics
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
NRP	National reform plan
CNFIS	National Council for Higher Education Funding

1 Introduction

Even though, Romania has participated into the Bologna Process since 1999, and as signatory country has taken several commitments regarding national policies in order to achieve the goals of the Bologna Process, which is the consolidation of the

J. Salmi (✉)
Global Tertiary Education Expert, Bogota, Colombia
e-mail: jsalmi@tertiaryeducation.org

C.M. Hâj · D. Alexe
Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: cezar.haj@uefiscdi.ro

D. Alexe
e-mail: daniela.alexe@uefiscdi.ro

C.M. Hâj
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania

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European Higher Education Area (EHEA),[1] no analysis exists to this day regarding how these commitments have actually translated into national policy, especially regarding equity.

Furthermore, looking at the Romanian higher education system, one can see that even though the country has a legislative framework that targets equity, data regarding participation rates of various under-represented or disadvantaged groups show that these policies are not effective, "Romania having one of the lowest scores compared with other EU states" (NRP 2009–2013).

Also, in order to understand why these policies have not achieved their goals, it is necessary to see how universities understand and implement these policies at the institutional level. In this context, the main objectives of the present article are to analyse how Romania's commitments regarding equity in higher education within the Bologna Process are translated into national policies and how Romanian universities implement them, looking in particular at the policies regarding student accommodation (students dorms) and at the scholarship system as means of enhancing equity in higher education.

Starting from Romania's commitments within the Bologna Process in the European context, and placing them in an appropriate theoretical context, the article will present a snapshot of the current trends in a comprehensive manner to see if and how equity is on the public agenda. Then it will analyse the main national policies in Romania that are influencing or could influence equity in higher education, what has been done until now and what the available data shows with regard to equity. Once the general setting has been analysed, the article will go into depth to analyse institutional behaviours regarding equity and how the most important policies identified in this article are translated into institutional policies and actions.

The article is based on the work carried out by the authors within the project "Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania" implemented by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Innovation and Development Funding (UEFISCDI),[2] in which analysis were made regarding Romania's commitments within the Bologna Process and regarding equity within a sample of universities.

Methodologically, the authors relied on desk research, a self-assessment instrument, and study visits. The desk research included gathering and analysing information from the national legal framework, official papers released by international and national institutions and research articles or perception studies in the field of equity in higher education. Also, it implied gathering and analysing data provided mainly by the National Institute for Statistics (NIS),[3] Ministry of National Education and National Council for Higher Education Funding (CNFIS). The self-assessment instrument was developed by the International Association of Universities (IAU) in 2010 and modified in 2013, in the context of the UEFISCDI project

[1] Further, the article uses the abbreviation EHEA for the European Higher Education Area.

[2] Reference: http://www.politici-edu.ro/?lang=en.

[3] Reference: NIS (2013).

mentioned above, in order to fit into the Romanian context. Its implementation aimed at gathering information regarding institutional policies and data on equity in higher education. The self-assessment instrument was applied in four universities. The study visits were conducted in the same four Romanian universities with different profiles (public and private, from Bucharest and other university centres) through semi-structured interviews that included relevant university representatives and stakeholders (rectors, senate members, administrative staff, teachers and students). The paper also draws on the various authors' knowledge which includes in-depth experience at the World Bank, universities, the ministry of education, national student's union and the Romanian Bologna Secretariat (2009–2012).

2 Setting the Background

The concept of "equity" in higher education can have several meanings depending on the perspective used. In a recent article, Salmi and Bassett stressed the importance of equity for fairness and efficiency purposes. The economic efficiency argument in favour of equity promotion is related to the development of human resources and the capacity to capture economic and social benefits. The example given is that of a talented, low-income and/or minority high school graduate who is denied entry into tertiary education, thus representing an absolute loss of human capital for the individual person and for society as a whole (Salmi and Bassett 2014). Another perspective refers to the equality of participation across ethnicities or socio-economic backgrounds (Harper et al. 2009). This approach argues that the student body in higher education should reflect the distribution of socio-economic status and ethnicity/race within the population from which the student body is drawn (Astin and Oseguera 2004; Harper et al. 2009; Niemann and Maruyama 2005).

Though the article takes into consideration the various understandings of equity, the basis of the study is the Bologna Process and the EU's understanding regarding equity. The European Union's view on equity, as stressed in one of its communications, is "the extent to which individuals can take advantage of education and training, in terms of opportunities, access, treatment and outcomes" and the outcomes of education are "independent of socio-economic background and other factors that lead to educational disadvantage" (Commission of the European Union 2006).

Within the Bologna Process (to which Romania was one of the first adhering countries), assuming responsibility for the development of the social dimension of education was underlined by the Ministers responsible for education from the EHEA, for the first time, in a communication adopted at the Prague Ministerial Conference (2001). Subsequently this ideal was operationalized in political commitments regarding equity, access and completion of studies in higher education, through concrete government strategies and clear targets for enlarging access and raising participation. With the adoption of the London Communication (2007), the Ministers reaffirmed their political commitment to the principle of equity, defining it as: "… the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education

at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background".

The concrete objectives regarding equity and access to higher education assumed by Romania, as a member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) following its Bologna Process commitments, are:

- Setting measurable targets for widening overall participation. Efforts to achieve equity in higher education should be complemented by actions in other parts of the educational system—Leuven (2009), Bucharest (2012);
- Strengthening policies of raising completion rates in higher education—Bucharest (2012);
- Setting measurable targets for increasing the participation of under-represented groups in higher education—Leuven (2009), Bucharest (2012);
- Reporting national strategies, policies, action plans and measures to evaluate their effectiveness, in the field of social dimension—London (2007).

3 Analysing Equity in the Romanian Higher Education System

3.1 Looking at the Strategic Policy Documents

The Romanian policy objectives regarding higher education are put forward in national strategies and other policy documents. Analysing the governing program for 2013–2016, the chapters regarding education and youth mention the following objectives related to equity in higher education:

- Ensuring social equity policies;
- Stimulating the participation of the Roma population to higher levels of education;
- Ensuring complementary education for raising the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and rebuilding social cohesion through: developing educational alternatives, training youth through sports, rebuilding camps for pupils and students, institutionalizing the participation in projects and programs dealing with areas complementary to the curriculum;
- Stimulating youth from a rural background to go to school;
- Social scholarships need to ensure, each month, the expenses for meals, school supplies and housing necessary for students (Government of Romania 2013).

Another strategic document relevant for the purpose of this article is the National Pact for Education, signed in 2008 by all parliament political parties and by 22 civil society organizations. This policy document listed eight major objectives on which any new legislative framework should be based. One of which introduced the notion of "priority education areas" (areas in which measures should have been

adopted with priority), in order to surpass the differences that dramatically separate the rural and urban environments or affect different categories of Romanian citizens (The National Pact for Education 2008).

Also, the National Reform Plan 2009–2013 (NRP)[4] mentions the fact that Romania currently does not effectively encourage access to education, basing this statement on the fact that the country currently occupies one of the last positions in Europe regarding participation of youths aged 15–24.

Referring to social inclusion, the NRP reviews the policies in place developed by the Ministry of National Education regarding: rural population, Roma population, children with special educational requirements (CES), other vulnerable groups (children from socio-economical disadvantaged groups, home alone children—children with parents that are working abroad, immigrants, and others) (Government of Romania 2009).

Even though no official singular document regarding the definition of disadvantaged and under-represented groups in higher education was found in the desk research phase, the authors considered the following groups to be of interest for the current study: female students, students coming from low income families (including working students), students from rural areas, students with disabilities and Roma students. These groups were identified based on the information available in analysed policy documents (such as special measures for inclusion in higher education which are already in place for certain groups), and by taking into account international practice and experience.

3.2 Looking at the Data

When addressing equity of higher education, it is necessary to look separately at its three dimensions: equity of access which means offering equal opportunities to enrol in universities, equity of results which relates to opportunities to advance in the system and to successfully complete tertiary level studies; and equity of outcomes which looks at the labour market outcomes of various groups (Salmi and Bassett 2014).

In this context, the authors took into consideration the data regarding secondary education, especially of those graduating from the Baccalaureate (as a first sine qua non legal condition for having access to higher education) and the data regarding the characteristics of the student body. The article will focus less on labour market outcomes of various groups because of the lack of available data.

Regarding secondary education, according to the NIS, for the time period 1995–2011, the evolution of the population at high school age (15–18 years) can be correlated with the evolution of the population from the same age enrolled in high school (Fig. 1).

[4] Further, the article will use the abbreviation NRP for the National Reform Plan.

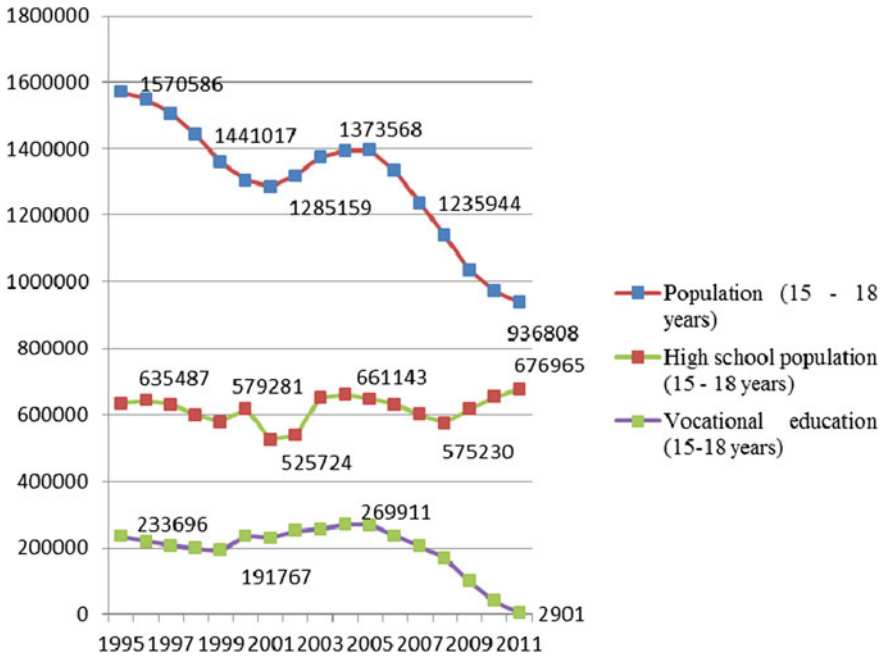

Fig. 1 Evolution of population, high school population and vocational education population (15–18 years), NIS

The data shows that the number of young people enrolled in vocational education started to drop in 2008, while the number of high schools students started to increase. This can be correlated with the government's decision to close trade schools,[5] which redirected young people to high-schools. Nevertheless, according to the data provided by the NIS, the participation rate in high schools of population aged 15–18 years started to decrease in 2010, this decrease being stronger than the demographic decline. It can be concluded that there are also other factors influencing access to secondary education apart from demographics, one of them being the decision to close the trade schools.

A notable phenomenon affecting equity in higher education is the evolution of the number of high school students who have passed the baccalaureate, which has dramatically decreased from 81.4 % in 2009 to 44.47 % in 2011, mainly due to the multiple anti-fraud measures that were successfully introduced (Fig. 2).

Analysing the data provided by the NIS one can see that the decrease is primarily felt in private universities where the number of students enrolled in 2012, in the first year of study, at bachelor level, has decreased by 76.4 % compared to 2007.

[5] Reference: Order no. (77/2009).

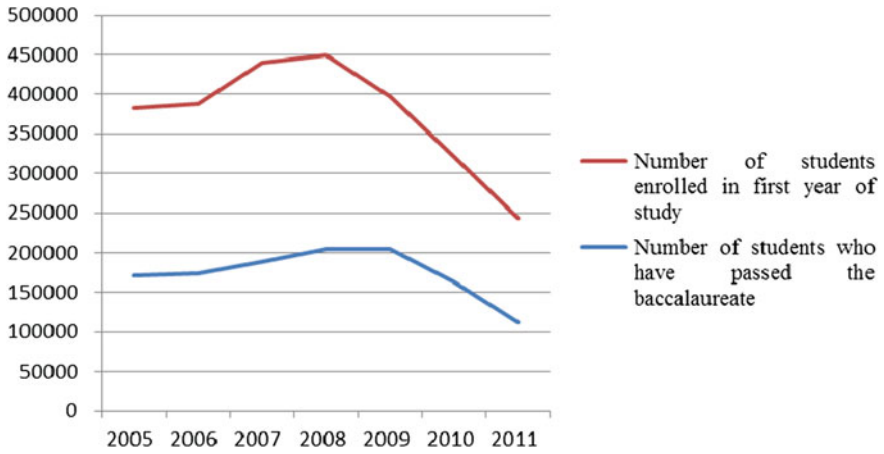

Fig. 2 Evolution of the number of students who have passed the baccalaureate, students enrolled in the first year—bachelor level. *Reference* Data from NIS and the National Assessment and Examination Center

Therefore, the decreasing number of students accessing higher education can be attributed at the same time to the demographic decrease of young population, the reduction in the high school population and of the lower success rate at the baccalaureate exam (Table 1).

Looking at the characteristics of the student body, especially at the data regarding the participation of disadvantaged/under-represented groups in higher education, the first remark could be that there is no official singular document defining and targeting these groups, even if there are international commitments that require such targets.[6] Official policy documents tackle the issue of the low participation of some disadvantaged groups and others mention measures and policies in place (as described in above section), but there is no coherent policy framework regarding equity. However, by analysing the legal framework and the current policies, several instruments can be found for enhancing the inclusion of some specific groups, even if there is no correlation between their goals and specific measures at the national level. In this context, the authors found useful to include in the present article a short overview of the data regarding the participation of the groups considered under-represented (as described at the end of this chapter), according to current references in official documents.

The first observation relates to the gender distribution among students. One can observe that at the national level, the percentage of female students is almost the same with male students (53.1 % female and 46.9 % male in 2012). Looking at the distribution on field of study, female students are the majority, especially in

[6] See Sect. 4.

Table 1 The evolution of the number of students, bachelor level source: NIS, data do not include foreign students

	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
Total	61,1779	64,1400	716,464	785,506	896,258	891,098	77,5319	673,001	539,852
Public	468,024	486,419	513,678	520,263	516,650	480,239	452,982	433,063	399,464
Private	143,755	154,981	202,786	265,243	379,608	410,859	322,337	239,938	140,388

medical, pharmaceutical, humanistic,[7] economic, artistic and judicial fields. By contrast, male students are predominant in technical education[8] (NIS 2012). No specific gender policy was identified in order to address the above mentioned issue.

Regarding the participation of youth coming from low-income families, according to an analysis by the World Bank based on the household budget survey (2011), in 2009, only 3.8 % of the youth aged 25–29 years from the 20 % (quintile) poorest young people, have graduated one cycle of higher education, while 52.4 % of the top 20 % (quintile) most wealthy young people have graduated at the same level (World Bank 2011). In this context, even if the growth in enrolment has been impressive, there is a concern that the equity dimension was not addressed comprehensively and that the enrolment gap between the wealthiest and poorest groups has continued growing (World Bank 2013).

Youths originating from rural areas are also an under-represented group in higher education. On one hand, according to the NIS, in 2011, 45 % of the total population and 51.2 % of the population aged 15–19 years resides in rural areas. On the other hand, according to the same source, at the beginning of the 2011/2012 academic year, approx. 24 % of the total number of students in the bachelor cycle were students which resided in a rural area. A World Bank and Ministry of Education, Research and Youth study (2008) indicates that only 3.7 % of youth aged 25–29 from a rural background have graduated from higher education institutions, compared to 27.2 % from an urban background. The numbers indicate clearly that it is almost nine times more likely for a young person originating from an urban background to be a higher education graduate than for a young person from a rural background.

Regarding the participation of students with disabilities in Romania, the percentage of youth with disabilities in the total youth population (aged 20–29) was 2.06 % (NIS, population census of 2002). More than that, in 2012, the share of disabled people in the total number of population was 3.66 % (NIS 2012). Between 2005 and 2010, at national level, the percentage of students with disabilities has never been higher than 0.07 % of the total number of students, according to data collected as part of the university classification process.[9] According to NIS, at bachelor level, at the beginning of the academic year 2011–2012, there were 333 disabled students in the entire Romanian student population (539.852 students) of which 309 were in public universities and 24 in private universities.

As far as Roma students are concerned, 0.6 % of the Roma population aged 25–29 years graduated from higher education, compared with 24.2 % for the general Romanian population and 18.7 % for Hungarians living in Romania in the same age bracket (World Bank 2013).

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[7] Humanistic education includes fields of studies like philology, history, geography, biology, chemestry and others.

[8] Technical education refers to engineering sciences at university level as civil engineering, electronics, telecommunications, mechanical and others.

[9] Data collection process (2011)

Regarding the participation of Roma youth in secondary education, the number of Roma students admitted in high schools increased by 44.2 % from 2009/2010 to 2011/2012, from 2246 in 2009 to 3239 in 2011. But despite this sizeable increase in Roma participation in secondary education, only 40.1 % of available subsidized study places for Roma students were taken (Ministry of National Education 2013).

Analysing the data available regarding the under-represented groups in Romanian higher education, the conclusions that can be drawn are as follows:

- Overall, there are no major differences in the proportion of females and males in the student body. Differences could be seen in the gender distribution among different fields of studies.
- Youths coming from the poorest families have far less opportunities to access higher education compared with youths coming from the richest families.
- The percentage of students from rural areas in the total number of students is far lower than the share of young people from rural areas in the total number of young people in the country.
- The percentage of students with disabilities is very low compared to the total number of youths with disabilities in the country.
- Despite the implementation of many policies, Roma access to education remains limited both at the secondary (giving the fact that almost half of the subsidized study places allocated for Roma in high schools are still vacant) and at the tertiary education levels.

3.2.1 National Policies Regarding Equity in Higher Education

The structure of the Romanian higher education system (in 2010) is divided between private universities (approx. 35 % of the total number of students), which do not receive any funding from the government, and public universities, which enrol both students paying tuition fees (approx. 35 % of the total number of students from Romania) and students supported by the state (approx. 30 % of the total number of students) who are eligible for most of the equity instruments.

Three broad categories of social services are to be found in Romanian universities: social services or facilities for all students (e.g., reduced fee for local and national transportation, medical and psychological assistance, and others), social services or facilities for students in state universities (subsidized study places, student scholarships, subsidies for dorms and canteens etc.) and social services or facilities for certain categories of students (for example free dorm accommodation for some categories of students, student camps and other).

3.2.2 Paying for Tuition Fees

According to the National Education Law (1/2011), university education is free for the enrolment number approved annually by the Government or is paid for by the

students, according to terms set by the law. Students who go to state universities either pay their own tuition or get their tuition costs covered by the state budget through subsidized study places. In private universities all students pay tuition fees, except for the cases where university senates decide otherwise.

From the perspective of access to higher education, it is important to analyse how state subsidized study places are distributed.

The subsidized study places are distributed to students **based on the results of** the admission exams organized by universities according to a general framework approved by the Ministry of National Education.[10] The subsidized study places are occupied by the most academically qualified candidates from all fields of study. When calculating the general admission score, the universities can also use the following criteria: grades from the baccalaureate exam, grades obtained in high-school in relevant subjects for the higher education programmes or grades from exams organized by universities (for testing knowledge and cognitive capacities).

In most universities, at the end of the first year of undergraduate studies, the subsidized study places are redistributed annually based on academic results obtained in the previous university year.

The categories of youths who benefit from separately set subsidized study places are:

- Roma Youth [11] (in the 2012/2013 university year approximately 548 places were allocated for the first year of undergraduate studies compared with 7906 places allotted for secondary education);
- High school graduates with a baccalaureate diploma from placement centres, under conditions set by each university senate[12] (at least one state subsidized study place per university);
- Ethnic Romanian students from abroad based on a methodology approved by a Government Decision (in the 2012/2013 university year, at the national level, 500 subsidized study places were approved—300 with scholarships and 200 without scholarships).[13]

The National Education Law states that "… candidates from environments with high socio-economic risks or socially marginalized—Roma, graduated from rural high-schools or cities with less than 10000 inhabitants—may benefit from a number of guaranteed state subsidized study places, as specified by the law" but this article has not yet been operationalized in the funding methodology or in the general admission framework.

As far as tuition fees paid by students are concerned, the value of the study grant allocated by the Ministry of Education and the amount of tuition fees in both public and private universities are significantly different (see Table 2). Since the level of

[10] Order no. (3544/2013).

[11] Reference: Order no. (4334/2012).

[12] Id. Ref. 10.

[13] Id. Ref. 10.

Table 2 Values of study grants and tuition fees

Field of study	Value of the study grant, for studies in Romanian, bachelor level—paid by the state to universities (euro)	Average tuition fees in public universities (euro)	Average tuition fees in private universities (euro)
Engineering sciences	850	740	508
Economy	483	620	500
Medicine	1,090	1,450	522

Calculations made by the authors based on public information regarding the values of tuition fees and CNFIS formula on the value of study grants

tuition fees is set by universities themselves, without any nationally-imposed standard or regulation, the value of the fees does not necessarily represent the cost of education, but rather the student's ability to pay or the "market price" of education.

In the context of equity, it is important to take into consideration the fact that, in 2010, only approximately 30 % of the students in Romania (public and private) were covered through the subsidized study places, the rest paying tuition fees.[14] In the meantime, the minimum salary in Romania is of about 180 Euros per month and the net medium salary is of approximately 365 euros per month (NIS 2013).

3.2.3 The Scholarship System

According to the National Education Law, direct financial support for students consists of scholarships or study loans. The scholarship system is analysed below in the section on what happens at the institutional level. Even though it is mentioned in the national legislation, the loan system is not functional.

3.2.4 Subsidized Student Dorm Places

The student dorms and canteens are subsidized by the state according to the Law of Education. The article presents below in Sect 3—Student dormitories an analysis regarding the current regulations from the institutional level and their impact on equity, focusing mainly on the categories of students that have access to dorms.

3.2.5 Other Social and Academic Services for Students

By looking at the current legal framework and the information available regarding its operation, it is evident that there are a variety of services that are designed to

[14] Reference: Data from NIS and the National Council for Higher Education Funding (CNFIS).

ensure an auspicious environment for students to complete and perform in a study program. However, from the authors' experience, certain services are not properly implemented and the targeted groups of students do not benefit from them. For example, according to the law, all Romanian students should benefit from reduced fees for local public transportation. Due to the existing bureaucratic procedures and the lack of concern to ensure this service at both the Ministry level and at the level of some public administrations/universities, not all students are able to receive these discounts.

Employment-related academic services (also mentioned in the Bologna Process Communiques) can include flexibility of learning paths, counselling and orientation services, alternative access routes or recognition of prior learning. Flexibility of learning is implemented at the national level through the "no attendance" system[15] and distance learning education[16] and at the university/faculty level through the offering of optional or facultative courses, which vary in number and typology in each university, study fields or study program. However, in many cases, the range of optional classes is narrow, students having to choose a course from only two or three optional courses available.

3.2.6 Other Policies with Impact on Equity

Outside the financing policies (subsidies and financial aid) and those related to social services that have a greater impact on equity of higher education, the national policies regarding quality assurance (QA) are meant to primarily enhance the quality of education, but they also have a great impact on institutional behaviour. The most relevant procedures regarding quality assurance in Romanian higher education system are those related to the accreditation and periodical evaluation of universities. From the reference standards and common performance indicators adopted within the national QA methodology (ARACIS 2006), one could see that there are no indicators specifically targeting equity or stimulating the participation of under-represented groups, except for some standards referring to the scholarship system or to student' dorms. Moreover, it seems that, concerning admission policies, a reference standard mentions that admission is based exclusively on academic competences, limiting the possibility for one university to distribute, for example, subsidised study places for students with disabilities.

[15] The Law of National Education defines "no attendance" education as being characterized by "periodical compact activities dedicated especially to synthesis courses and practice applications which implies face-to-face meetings between students and teachers in the university area, accompanied by other specific means for distance education (Art. 139, b).

[16] The Law of National Education defines distance education as being characterized by "the use of electronic, communication and information resources, specific self-learning and self-assessment activities, accompanied by tutoring activities" (Art. 139, c).

4 Analysing Institutional Behaviour in Regard to Equity

4.1 General Remarks

As described in the introduction, institutional behaviour is analysed through four case studies, using two different instruments: a self-assessment questionnaire developed by IAU, aimed at gathering information regarding institutional policies and data on equity in higher education, and study visits that included semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders in each university. Also regarding the student scholarship system and the subsidized student dorm places, the authors comparatively analysed the internal regulations of all the public universities.

The study visits in the four sample universities showed common characteristics that can define the institutional approach to equity in the Romanian higher education system. The most important common characteristic that was identified in all the universities was the individual approach to students needs instead of developing institutional strategies with clear objectives and action plans. The reasons for this behaviour could be: the lack of awareness of the need for and benefits of equity policies, a specific approach to policy making in which decisions are taken when a problem occurs without having a strategic framework and, last but not least, the different understanding of equity and also the lack of a national strategy and/or specific guidelines. The concept of "equity" is understood in different ways, from being understood as equality and non-discrimination to being related to the university's role in society or to market instruments design to attract new categories of students.

One of the findings is that universities are well aware of the diversity of the student population in their region. Even when they don't have any strategy or specific equity target with regard to admission and inclusiveness, they usually know the characteristics of the student population very well.

Regarding under-represented/vulnerable groups, the group whose needs are addressed most frequently by universities are students from low-income families, defined as students coming from families with an income below the national minimum wage.

Certain under-represented groups of students, such as Roma students and students with disabilities benefit from special conditions,, but the number of students from these categories is very small, considering the general need to integrate them in higher education.

Certain universities have also identified groups of students with special needs in accordance to their own special regional context or field of activity. For example, in one university from an area with a high percentage of population working outside the country, many students also work outside the country during the academic year and come back only to take the exams at the end of the academic year. The institution representatives are aware of this issue and are trying to accommodate the special needs of individual students, but there are no institutional instruments to address the needs of this special group of students (ensuring equitable access to all eligible students and quality assurance instruments—for example organizing distance

learning programs). Also, no statements were made that would lead to the conclusion that the university is considering setting up a scholarship scheme to alleviate the financial needs of students who might otherwise need to go work abroad.

Working students represent another group of students with special needs, which also raises issues regarding the best policy approach to be taken. These students do not have time to attend courses and seminars, making it one of the most important challenges for the Romanian higher education institutions, with negative impact on the quality of education. As a general remark, the current university response to this trend seems to be that of making courses more flexible in order for students to attend (in evenings), the objective being that of retaining as many students as possible regardless of the consequences upon the quality of education (in the conditions explained in Sect. 4.2). In some cases, the need for practical experience is the reason that makes the university encourage working students.

Looking at the other groups taken into consideration by the authors, the analysis showed that students from rural areas could not be found among the priority groups and consequently no special measures or instruments were addressing their needs.

Regarding Roma students, special subsidized study places could be found in all state universities (as they are allocated from the Ministry of Education) but not all the study places were occupied and no specific institutional policy to promote recruitment for these study places was found.

In order to promote demand for their academic programmes, almost all the institutions undertake a number of actions such as outreach to secondary schools, career counselling and special courses to help high school students pass the admission exam, but these interventions do not usually take equity aspects into consideration.

4.2 Student Scholarships System

The Romanian Student Scholarship system is regulated by the National Education Law (1/2011) and by an earlier Government Decision.[17] Conceptually, it continues the system implemented in Romania during the communist regime. The general criteria for awarding scholarships are regulated at the national level and specific criteria are decided at the institutional level.

There are two main types of scholarships: based on merit (merit scholarships) with different subcategories (study scholarships, merit scholarships and performance scholarships) and based on social needs (social scholarships) with different subcategories (social scholarships, medical scholarships). According to the law on education, the same student can receive different types of scholarships if she/he fulfils the eligibility criteria. These scholarships are awarded for the duration of a full academic year, with some exceptions that include a full calendar year in the

[17] Order no. (558/1998).

case of medical scholarships, performance scholarships, and scholarships for orphans.

The scholarships are awarded on a competitive basis, the universities taking into consideration:

- the number of scholarships resulting from dividing the overall scholarship grant given by the state to the amounts set by the university, for every type of scholarship, and
- the number of full time students who are studying in state-subsidized study places.

The total available monthly amount for scholarships in a university is calculated by multiplying a fixed sum awarded by the government (69 lei/state subsidized student place) by the above-mentioned student number. As the amount depends on the number of full time students studying in state subsidized study places, they are the only ones that are eligible to receive money from state funds. The universities can supplement the scholarship fund from their income and thus enlarge the pool of eligible students.

The general scholarship fund does not differentiate between social and merit scholarships, leaving the universities to decide how the funds are split between these categories. Thus the institutional behaviour in making this decision is a proxy for the importance given to equity matters by Romanian universities.

4.2.1 Social Scholarships

The state regulates the distribution of social scholarships to students from low income families (with a net monthly income per family member lower than the national minimum wage), students from orphanages or foster care, and students with predefined medical problems.

Also according to the law, the minimum amount of these scholarships should be proposed annually by National Council for Higher Education Funding (CNFIS),[18] considering the fact that the scholarship must cover the minimum amounts needed for food and accommodation (Art. 223 paragraph 10).

4.2.2 Merit Based Scholarships

The state awards funds for scholarships as incentives to students with high academic performance (article 12, paragraph 3) and to stimulate excellence (article 223, paragraph 10). These scholarships are granted based on academic results.

[18] Further, the article will use the abbreviation CNFIS for the National Council for Higher Education Funding.

Performance scholarships are awarded for scientific, cultural, artistic and sports performance and the criteria for their disbursement are set at the university level.

Looking at the objectives of these types of scholarships, all legal documents that influence the granting of scholarships (National Education Law, the explanatory memorandum for the education law, secondary legislation) reiterate the following major objectives:

- The merit scholarships' aim is firstly to stimulate learning and also to stimulate performance and excellence;
- The social scholarships' aim is welfare, financial support for students with low income and social protection.

4.2.3 Finding the Data and Doing the Math

In Romania there were a total of 539.852 students in the first cycle (bachelor degree) in October 2012, out of which 208.965 students in state-subsidized study places (CNFIS 2013), thus given that the scholarship subsidy is 69 lei per subsidized student, the total amount available for scholarships for the first study cycle (bachelor degree) would be 14.418.585 lei (3204139 euro) per month.

Although the student population has grown with the massification of higher education, the number of subsidized study places remained relatively constant (CNFIS 2013).

According to the Education Law (Art. 223, paragraph 10) "… the minimum amount for social scholarships is proposed annually by CNFIS, considering the fact that they must cover the minimum amounts for food and accommodation". Consequently CNFIS had an Initiative to assess the minimum costs for food and accommodation at the national level. The responses received from 30 state universities revealed that:

- The national average amount in terms of the minimum cost for accommodation is 118 lei /month;
- The national average amount in terms of the minimum cost for food (lunch and dinner) is 448 lei /month, calculated at an average price of 15 lei X 30 days;
- The national average amount of the awarded social scholarships is 192 lei;
- The percentage of the funds awarded for social scholarships is 10.85 (%) from the total scholarship fund;
- The percentage of funds from the universities own incomes included in the scholarship funds is 7.29 (%);

These figures are in accordance with another study made by students in 2009 that indicated that the average cost for accommodation for a student is 124.67 lei/month and the average cost of food is 483.49 lei/month (National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania 2009).

Starting from the percentage of the funds awarded for social scholarships which is 10.85 (%) and the average value of a social scholarship which is 192 lei, one can

estimate that for the first cycle 8,148 social scholarships could be awarded to students (10.85 % × 14.418.585 /192), representing 3.9 % of all first cycle students who are studying on subsidized study places. When looking at the entire population of students one can see that the social scholarship system would cover only 1.5 % of all undergraduate students.

Also, looking at the data from the NIS, one can see that more that 50 % of students live in the four biggest cities in Romania, which also have the highest cost of living (Bucharest 23.20 %, Cluj-Napoca 12.80 %, Iasi, 11.70 %, Timisoara 7.80 %).

4.2.4 Analysing How Institutions Implement the Scholarship System as an Equity Tool

The analysis made by the authors on regulations for scholarships at the institutional level found the following results:

- 10 out of 49 state universities (that have subsidized study places) do not have a functional website, or have not made public the rules for student scholarships, in order for students to apply.
- Only nine universities out of the 39 state universities whose regulations were reviewed formally allow the combination of social scholarships with merit based ones, even though the national education law permits that.
- In only six universities out of the 39 state universities, scholarships are awarded for the full academic year according to the law, the rest award the scholarships per semester thus mitigating the impact of this instrument especially for poor students.
- 32 out of the 39 state universities formally link academic achievement criteria to eligibility for social scholarships.

4.3 Student Dormitories

The state gives subsidies for dorms and canteens that partially cover the living costs, the difference being paid through fees from students. The dorm places are distributed to students who do not have a permanent residence in the city where they study, based on criteria approved by university senates. The latest data available show that, in the academic year 2009/2010, 17.5 % from the total number of students in state universities and 37.3 % of students financed by the state were accommodated in student dorms.[19]

[19] Reference: Data gathered in the classification of universities process.

Giving the fact that these facilities represent support to decrease the costs of living, a question that arises in the context of equitable access to higher education refers to who is receiving this support. The article tries to answer this question by analysing the criteria on how places in dorms are distributed to students. In this regard, the regulations approved by the university Senates of 41 state universities were analysed. The analysis excludes military universities due to their specificity and those universities where regulations are not made public on the university website (five cases).

The first observation would be that the majority of universities (26) have clear procedures and criteria regarding the distribution of places in dormitories and the regulations are published on their official websites. Four universities follow a specific procedure but have no clear criteria for distribution. In other four cases, a commission establishes the criteria for distribution after analysing all requests from students. Five universities fail to publish the procedure on their web site.

In most cases, places in dormitories are available to all students of the university, regardless of whether they are financed or not by the state or whether they are enrolled in the first or the second cycle. Nevertheless, there are a few higher education institutions where only students on subsidized study places (seven institutions) or students from full-time learning programmes (four institutions) can apply for a place in the dormitories. Other universities mention in their methodology that students on subsidized study places have priority (two institutions).

In 69 % of the cases, the academic performance of the students is clearly mentioned in the analysed methodologies as the first distribution criteria. In 54 % of universities, the grades obtained in the previous school year, are used as a measurement instrument for the students' performance. Sometimes, additional criteria are used, such as the number of ECTS credits accumulated on extra-curricular activities in which the students were involved or their course attendance rate. It should be mentioned that there are two universities that also use the moral behaviour of students as a criterion (no further explanation on the definition of the "moral behaviour of students" are to be found in the regulations).

All methodologies mention the student categories that have priority in receiving dorm places:

- Most of the HEI's do not differentiate between disadvantaged /under-represented groups who receive support from the university in order to lower the financial pressure by reducing the living costs and other groups of students receiving support for other reasons than social needs (e.g.: foreign students that receive a state scholarship);
- 32 % of the universities also mention academic performance criteria in their procedures for distribution of places to social and medical cases. They either apply the merit-based criteria to all the disadvantaged groups or only to a few categories. The merit-based criteria retrieved are: the status of the student (budget or tax), the number of ECTS accumulated, the average grade for the previous academic year etc. For the rest of the universities it is unclear whether

they also use merit-based criteria for the distribution of places reserved to social cases.

Regarding the distribution of the total number of places in the student dormitories to performance students or to under-represented and disadvantaged groups, three types of situations were observed:

- The institution does not have a procedure for the distribution of the number of places reserved for under-represented and disadvantaged groups from the total number of places in dormitories—78 % of the universities;
- The commission (department) responsible for the distribution of the dormitory places analyses the applications (from both the students from a disadvantaged group and those with high learning performances) and decides the number of places for each of the two categories—5 % of the universities;
- The methodologies clearly specify the maximum number of places distributed on social or medical criteria—20 % of the universities. Usually this reaches a maximum of 10 % of the total number of available places. There is only one exception: one higher education institution distributes 10–25 % of the available dormitory places according to social and medical criteria.

Table 3 shows the categories and percentage of students who have priority access to student dormitories, according to the universities' regulations:

Looking at the national policy documents about the access of under-represented groups in higher education and analysing the data from universities regulation, one

Table 3 Categories of students that have priority to student dorms

	% of universities in which the group represents a priority for dormitories
Orphan students and students from placement centres	76
Foreign students with scholarships from the Romanian state	58.50
Student families	51.20
Students from low-income families	44
Students with medical problems (especially chronic diseases)	34.10
Students proving their quality or of one of the parents of"Fight for Romanian Revolution of December 1989" or " hero-martyr "- with one of the entries: injured, detained, injured and detained, noted for outstanding deeds, accompanied by the certificate signed by the President of Romania	31.70
Disabled students or some categories of disabled students	19.50
Students with children	14.60
Students from rural areas	2.43 (one university)

can conclude that the need to integrate specific groups as students from rural areas, students from low-income families or Roma students is not being reflected in existing university policies or regulations. Only 44 % of the universities give priority in allocating dorm places to students coming from low-income families. Moreover, for this category, merit-based criteria are usually used (ex: for students to have passed all the exams). Furthermore, Roma students or students from rural areas are not a priority group for receiving places in dormitories in the universities analysed. Only one university offers dormitory places with priority to rural area students.

There are some categories of students who, according to the National Law of Education, receive free accommodation or discounts, such as students whose parents are teachers or ethnic Romanian coming from abroad. The majority of universities have some regulations for these categories, but not all of them.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

Even though Romania has gone through over two decades of reforms in the higher education while assuming the "massification of education" philosophy, higher education continues to be an area less accessible for the poorest or disadvantaged segments of the population. The concern for equity at the national level is mainly rhetorical, as a small dimension in otherwise largely meritocratic higher education policies. The main effect of this situation is the lack of response, at the institutional level, to the few formal existing policies on equity. The reasons for this situation have been briefly researched in this article and should be further investigated.

Starting from the Romanian commitments within the Bologna Process, the need for a strategic approach towards equity is clear, especially since, looking at the main policy documents regulating the higher education sector (government program, the Pact for Education, NRP), one can see a consensus on equity in higher education as a national priority. Currently, Romania does not have a strategy regarding the social dimension, which should include the definition of under-represented and disadvantaged groups, measurable targets for widening overall participation and for increasing the participation of under-represented groups, policies, action plans and measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.

Regardless of the commitments within the Bologna Process, targeting widening access to higher education, the reduced numbers of students and the relative unbalanced composition of the student population, a change in the national and institutional policies and behaviours is not visible in the sense of addressing this issue with specific policies. The legislative framework and the institutional practices are almost the same as during the "massification" period when the economic crisis was not affecting higher education.

Based on available data, this article identified the following main equity groups: students coming from low income families, students from rural areas, students with disabilities, Roma students and working students. Female students were not included

as data shows an overall balanced gender distribution at the national level, albeit with some degree of gender inequality in different fields of studies.

Also, when looking at the data regarding the participation of under-represented groups, taking into consideration Romania's commitments to increasing their participation, one can see that there are not enough policies targeting those specific groups (for example students with disabilities). Moreover, from the policies that could be identified, some are not functional (for example scholarships for students from rural areas, subsidized places for students from disadvantaged areas) and the rest are implemented but not monitored in order to see if their objectives are being achieved (for example the scholarship system or the subsidized quota study places for Roma students).

The current national policies have never been analysed or revised after the mid 1990s. For example, in the case of the scholarship system, the fact that the government is pursuing two different policy objectives at the same time (encouraging academic performance and helping students with financial or medical needs) resembles an attempt to "catch two birds with one stone". Studies like the one carried out by CNFIS reveal that the actual amounts of social scholarships are too small to cover the essential expenses (food and accommodation) and universities rarely allow for the possibility of combining merit and social scholarships according to the law.

Moving from the national level to looking at the adequacy of equity policies at the institutional level, one of the main conclusions would be that the lack of a national strategy toward equity in higher education is mirrored by a similar lack of strategic approach at the institutional level. Instead, universities deal with these issues on an individual case basis. For example, even though students from rural areas or Roma students represent a priority according to the Government Programme (2013–2016), when looking at the institutional level one can see that the rural or Roma students do not represent a priority in granting financial support or access to different social services.

In some cases, the equity related institutional priorities do not seem to have an equivalent weight in the national policy framework. For example, disadvantaged groups such as students with families/children, considered as a priority in universities regulations, are not found in the national policy framework. In some cases, the institutional approaches are linked to the regional realities, the universities being more flexible for example regarding students working outside the country in one region with a very high percentage of young people in this situation.

Taking into consideration the current decrease in high school student numbers, the decreasing demographic trend and the low percentage of high school graduates with a baccalaureate diploma eligible to enter higher education, the main priority of universities is to attract and retain as many students as possible, regardless of the consequences upon the quality of education and regardless of equity considerations.

Another main conclusion would be that the merit-based criteria in the majority of universities is a precondition to benefit from equity instruments as shown in the distribution of study places, of scholarships or places in students dorms. Many universities even see equity as a concept in opposition to meritocracy.

Significant efforts are required to stimulate discussions and awareness among all higher education stakeholders about the added value and long-term necessity of elaborating policies and strategies for developing an equitable higher education system in Romania. Equity is key in making higher education a pillar for improving socio-economic conditions for all Romanian citizens and overcoming preconceptions inherited from the pre-1990s era would be an important first step in this direction.

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Evaluation Capacity Building as a Means to Improving Policy Making and Public Service in Higher Education

Nicolae Toderaş and Ana-Maria Stăvaru

Keywords Capacity building for evaluation · Organizational learning · Sustainable evaluation practice · Evaluation use in the Romanian higher education system

1 The Need for Evaluation Capacity Building

In order to strengthen the processes of organizational learning and to improve the policy making and implementation process in various public sector areas, organizations have been searching for means of putting evaluation into practice at the organizational level and offering their staff and management opportunities to learn about evaluation and to include evaluative thinking and acting in their day-to-day routine. In this respect, evaluation capacity building has become a very prolific topic of discussion and writing in the evaluation field since the year 2000 (Compton et al. 2001; Preskill and Boyle 2008). In the higher education system, among other fields like public health or social policy, evaluation capacity building has to deal with various stakeholders' interests and values and try to find a way of integrating evaluation as part of the system and not as an intrusive, external activity that has to be done in order to comply to external or internal pressures.

Throughout this analysis, the higher education system is seen as consisting of at least two types of organizations: those who provide educational services (such as universities), and those which possess attributions in the decision making process, policy planning and implementation, regulation, control or mere executive functions (such as the Ministry of National Education, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), the National Authority for Qualifica-

N. Toderaş (✉) · A.-M. Stăvaru
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: nicktod@yahoo.com

A.-M. Stăvaru
e-mail: anamaria.stavaru@gmail.com

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tions, the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI)). The following evaluation capacity building framework is addressed to the second type of organizations, in order to discuss a set of elements which can facilitate their organizational learning and improve their policy making functions. This choice was made because of the important part that the second type of organizations plays in the decision-making process.

There is a growing need in the Romanian higher education system for identifying mechanisms for improving public policies in the field of higher education and, implicitly, of other services which are complementary to the educational process, such as the impact of scholarships on improving the access to higher education and the quality of the educational process; the implementation of systems for acknowledging and validating qualifications and the related consequent competences; improving and increasing access to counselling and professional orientation services, among others. Evaluation is becoming more and more visible and used as one mean to improve policies, programs and/or organizations. Evaluation can be used not only as a step in the public policy making process, but also as an individual process for collecting, analyzing and interpreting the necessary facts for grounding, improving, legitimating, correcting and adapting policies, or even for developing capacities at the organizational level in general, and especially at the level of expert teams within organization. In spite of the fact that evaluation has been promoted in the Romanian public sector as part of the public policy cycle, in practice using evaluation at this state is relatively infrequent as there is no strategy in developing evaluation expert or funding the evaluation step of the policy making process and thus, evaluation rarely stays at the bottom of a new public policy.

The practice of evaluation started to develop in Romania only after the second half of the 1990s, and one of the factors which led to the institutionalization of this practice was the conditionality and expectations linked to different financing opportunities from external sources (Perianu 2008; Cerkez 2009a, b). During this period, the best examples of this are represented by the financing which was offered by international financial institutions and external donors. Even though the use of joint evaluation was encouraged as a mean for contributing to the development of an evaluation culture in partner countries, Romania as a recipient country and partner in the evaluation process was not able to create its own evaluation capacity, partly due to the fact that the evaluations were centred on the needs of the external donors, following their planning and programming cycle and not that of the partner country—and this was a common issue among those experimenting the joint evaluations (Dabelstein 2003). The educational field was one of the first beneficiaries of these development instruments which were accessed by Romania. For example, on the 31st of May 1996 the Romanian Government and the EU signed the Financial Memorandum for implementing the Phare Programme RO9601 Universitas 2000, which consisted in undertaking activities for evaluating components of the system in order to accomplish structural changes in Romanian higher education system. Thus, in association with the Reform of Higher Education and Research Project (Loan 4096-RO), financed by the World Bank and implemented by the Romanian Government, a series of exercises were conducted during the

1997–2001 period for evaluating procedures, methodologies and organizations within the national higher education and research system in order to improve the public policy making processes in this sector. On the other hand, a vast exercise in the field of evaluation took place between 2000 and 2001 as part of the Education Reform Project RO 3742 which was financed by the Romanian Government and the World Bank, its objective being to evaluate the implementation of the curricular reform for compulsory schools in the 1990–2000 decade (Vlasceanu et al. 2002).

After this period, once Romania's participation in European programs in the field of education and higher education began to increase, it became understood and clear that financing would critically depend on the evaluation of programs and projects which were implemented. What is more, with the advance of the reform in the central and local administrative sectors, the need for evaluation intensified both in terms of evaluating projects, programs and policy, but also in terms of evaluating organizations in order to increase their performance. For example, in the case of higher education system, quality assurance was established as a compulsory process (Law 87/2006). It wanted to lead to the implementation of a national system for quality assurance and was based on periodical internal and external evaluations. This entails the continuous evaluation of the educational process as a whole, as well as the organizational performance of higher education institutions which are subject to periodical evaluations. As a consequence, based on the experience which was accumulated during a policy cycle of quality assurance in higher education it became possible to apply a national exercise for collecting data and information for evaluating universities and study programs in order to classify universities and rank study programs. On the one hand, this exercise offered an overview of Romanian higher education institutions, as well as a series of data for grounding a new cycle of policies regarding higher education financing, quality assurance, developing research programs etc. On the other hand, this exercise demonstrated a level of institutional maturity of the actors within the system, as far as the use of evaluation as an useful instrument is regarded. In this case, universities as actors which are part of the system, used quality assurance as a guide in order to increase their performance, adaptability and friendliness, as well as a means for public accountability.

Evaluation capacity building as a means for improving organizational performance and public policies and programs is an aspect which has not been studied extensively in Romania. Also, its practical use for organizational learning is reduced. On the one hand, this subject is approached by few authors in Romanian specialized literature in spite of the fact that at the international level the interest for developing the evaluation capacity as an element of organizational change, and also the causes, motivation, influences, results or its use has a long tradition. On the other hand, universities' superficial approaches to evaluations prove that neither evaluation, nor organizational learning are understood and perceived as instruments capable of generating knowledge and reducing time for solution-finding. Though they could lead to organizational development towards finding more efficient, flexible and lasting solutions, university tend to neglect them. They mime achieving the standards, replicate the behaviour of older organizations or accomplish only the

minimum of what is demanded through standards and indicators in order to obtain formal recognition or financing, proving once again the lack of prospective thinking.

Organizational learning thus occurs in an unstructured manner, with significant losses regarding the accumulated experience and with weak emphasis on vision. Practices such as reforms which dismantle everything that was being built through the previous reform, without thinking strategically and selecting elements which can be used or further developed are another indicator of the lack of continuity in the thinking of policies and of the insufficient use of organizational learning. For example, between 2009 and 2011, through the Quality and Leadership for The Romanian Higher Education Project, UEFISCDI performed an exercise of systemic foresight for the development of higher education policy makers' prevision and leadership capacities. This approach was based on learning by examples and participation in the elaboration of strategic documents like Green Paper and White Paper (Andreescu et al. 2012). Although the exercise involved a large participation, the universities and policy makers did not implement the institutional recommendations designed within the White Paper.

Evaluation can also be used for adapting policies and organizations, thus contributing to saving time and increasing the probability of identifying an adequate alternative. Thus, during the time when a policy, a program or an organization develops, on-going or intermediary evaluations can point out eventual problematic aspects, difficulties, reticence, unfavourable conditions, unintended effects (positive or negative), alternative ways for handling problems, as well as opportunities occurred on the way that could be valued in order to increase the impact of the development process. This would allow reflection and finding, in due time, solutions for improving implementation and for getting closer to the intended results or effects. An anticipative adaptation approach offers the possibility of diminishing uncertainty periods and risks, informing debate and decision taking thus ensuring the continuity of the programs' implementation or of the organizations' activity. Understanding as early as possible which aspects can be improved also increases flexibility, allowing measures to be taken before an activity has advanced too far for changes to be made. Furthermore, costs are reduced because activities are stopped from unfolding towards possible deficient outcomes and allow for fixing inefficiencies as they appear, and for redirecting resources to aspects which deserve more or are in need of additional support.

2 Developing a Logical Framework for Evaluation Capacity Building in the Romanian Higher Education System

In spite of the fact that the technical assistance programs from the EU pre-accession period enabled the development of initiatives aimed towards generating a culture of evaluation. These initiatives which were expected to gradually lead to the full scale use of evaluation practices in order to improve the public policy making process, and a solid culture of evaluation have not been fully successful at the system level,

including in the higher education system. In spite of this fact, in recent years some ex-ante and intermediary implementation evaluations have been conducted regarding the operational programs for implementing structural and cohesion funds, some of which targeted components of the higher education system. However, these evaluations were rather meant to point out the needs within the system which could be addressed through the use of structural and cohesion funds, without directly targeting the improvement of the policy making process in the field of higher education through evaluation exercises.

The focus on the internalization of quality assurance, which was sustained by ARACIS, has led for some organizations to the perspective that the methodology and instruments used by ARACIS is the only possible approach. This could be seen as an aspect of coercive isomorphism (Păunescu et al. 2012), without learning through evaluation what it would mean to diversify and particularize evaluation approaches, models, methods and instruments. However, the methodological framework which is being used by ARACIS does not oblige universities to conduct deeper evaluations for understanding the way in which their established objectives are accomplished, estimating the social impact which the evaluated programs have, comparing the evaluated programs with each other (Cerkez 2010). The use of specific methods of evaluation capacity building would have been facilitating the enhancement of the institutional responsibility for quality.

Even though regulatory and executive higher education agencies sustained such a process of diversifying evaluation approaches, models and methods in order to increase the quality of services which are offered by actors within the system, they have not had the logistical capacity or the expertise necessary to sustain this process. Consequently, because of the lack of an organizational culture of evaluation the regulatory and executive higher education agencies within the system adopt a refractory behaviour when comprehensive system evaluations are being conducted, whether we are talking about quantitative of qualitative methods. For example, in the April–August 2011 period, when the first exercise for conducting the primary evaluation of universities and the evaluation of study programs in order to accomplish the classification of universities and the ranking of study programs, evaluators noticed the hostility with which the personnel and the management staff reacted to such a normal process of collecting the necessary evidences for this exercise of evaluating the systems' status. Such behaviour can be explained by the fact that until that moment there was no institutionalization or routine for collecting, processing and using evidence from the systemic level in order to evaluate the respective organizations within the system in order to improve the services they offer, and such a necessity was not perceived and treated as a priority either at the institutional level, or at national level. What is more, because of the lack of exercises such as this, public policies in the field of higher education have frequently been based only on the use of statistical data which was supplied by the National Statistics Institute which are rather scatter and frequently irrelevant, rather than on systematically collected, processed and interpreted evidence which would allow the evaluation of the actual state of different aspects of the system. For example it did not make it possible to assess the efficiency and impact of the policy for raising

access and maintaining within the system of Roma ethnics or the degree of active participation of students who are over 34 years old. This lack of evidence-based policies has led to policies and programs that do not respond directly to the needs, capacities and availability of the main actors, but rather to momentary political desires. The National Student Enrolment Registry, which was designed as an electronic database for registering all the students in Romania in state and private universities which are either accredited or authorized to operate, has proven to be a difficult instrument to implement. There are several difficulties in ensuring that all the functions with which it was designed are working properly, even though is should be already in place as the National Education Law (Art. 201) stipulates that this instrument has to be totally functional within maximum 2 years after the law was passed, which was in February 2013. The implementation of a program or policy should be seen as an open system, which is sensitive to a certain degree to interferences (Chen 2005). At the same time, the dynamics of transforming an initial state into a desired state through the implementation of a program or policy is dependent of the dynamics of the organizational internal and external pressures among other factors. Evaluations regarding the organizational development of the actors within the higher education system, including those for quality assurance which are specific to the suppliers of higher education programs, can be seen as a practice for improving both the actual services that they are offering, as well as the policies which they are implementing. From these evaluation exercises, organizations in the higher education system can learn from each other how to better accomplish the mission which they have undertaken and how better to accomplish their strategies, improve their practices etc. Learning through evaluation entails the fact that the evaluation process does not end when the final results are identified. Instead it includes prospective thinking of the next period of programming and implementation with the use of the knowledge and experience which have been gained, and, ultimately, restarting the evaluation cycle. This is a circular process, as it can be seen in Fig. 1, being made up of 4 steps, each step offering explanations for the situations which are identified in the subsequent steps

2.1 Stage 1: Shaping Evaluation Priorities and Creating Institutionalised Evaluation Structures

Evaluation knowledge and practice become better understood and increasingly used in organizations which resort to the implementation of intentional ECB strategies (Bourgeois and Cousins 2013). Shaping evaluation priorities at the organizational level implies developing processes like: (a) identifying important topics for dealing with organization's mission and objectives; (b) analysing the topics and revealing the logical connections between them; and (3) arrange them by previously established criteria and select priorities. Even if the Evaluation Capacity Building strategies rely on the creation of specific internal structures (such as evaluation

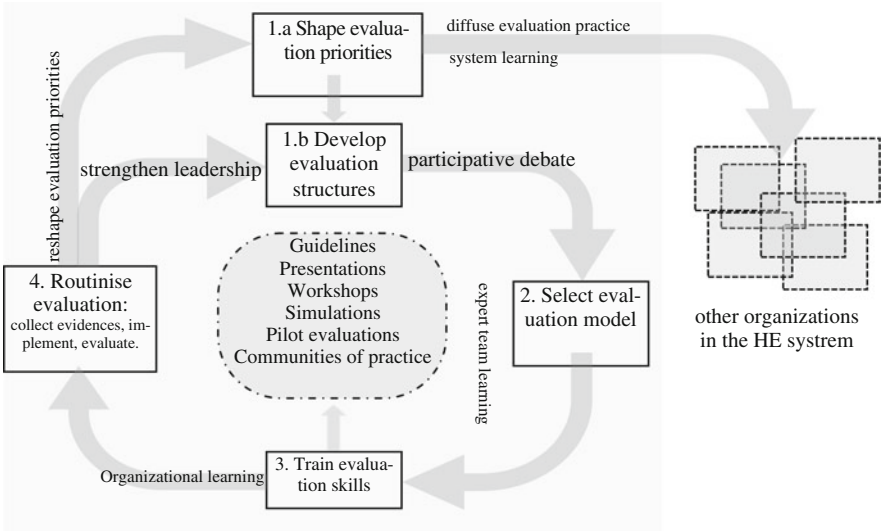

Fig. 1 Evaluation capacity building framework (authors)

departments or units) within the organization, they can have a broader impact and be more effective in the process of getting staff member used to addressing evaluation needs and using specific toolkits as a day-to-day routine. From the ECB perspective these structures have the role of ensuring the continuous evaluation and monitoring component, including the component for evaluating the projects which have been implemented by the respective organizations, by planning and conducting periodical evaluations regarding the adequacy of institutional arrangements (institutional blockages, necessary time etc.), efficiency and effectiveness, relevance, usefulness, the performance of implementing policies, programs, strategies and/or supplying services, administrative capacity etc. For example, within the Ministry of National Education this function is exerted by the Public Policy Unit, and within UEFISCDI evaluation is treated as an on-going process for the programs and system strategic projects which are implemented. In the case of UEFISCDI, this approach has been institutionalized, strengthened and perpetuated through the implementation of the Phare Universitas 2000 Program between 1996 and 2002, as well as the Higher Education and Research Reformation Program RO-4096, programs which can be consider as the basis for learning through evaluation at a systemic level. Apart from the functions which were presented earlier, these structures which have a role in evaluation could also serve as communication channels with beneficiaries and interested actors by generating a framework for participatory debate, thus implicating them in the evaluation process, as well as increasing the evaluations' degree of responsiveness to the needs of the community which it serves (Bărbulescu et al. 2012). Thus, this could lead to increased organizational learning, which can be understood as "the vehicle for utilizing past experiences, adapting to environmental changes and enabling future options"

(Berends et al. 2003). The learning process can use different means, such as dialogue, reflection, asking questions, identifying and clarifying values, beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (Preskill and Torres 1999), but in order for participants to become involved, they need to have the proper motivation to learn about evaluation and use it. In addition to motivation, participants need the organization to offer them "leadership, support, resources, and the necessary learning climate" (Taylor-Ritzler et al. 2013) so that the impact of ECB becomes visible.

At the level of organizations within the higher education system ECB can be undertaken both through internal means, as well as through external means. For example, in order to gain the status of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) member, a process which represents one of the main factors which has led to strengthening the position of ARACIS within the configuration of the national institutional environment, ARACIS needed to develop its own organizational evaluation capacity. The process of becoming an ENQA member was long and was carried out through both categories (internal and external) of ECB specific means, which needed examining the extent to which the standards the ENQA required for candidates had been achieved. From the internal perspective of the consolidation of ECB within ARACIS, the agency established a set of internal procedures and instruments through which it carried out an auto-evaluation exercise which represented the base for all the subsequent activities for applying to become an ENQA member. From the external perspective of the ECB consolidation within ARACIS, between the years 2007 and 2008, the European Universities Association (EUA) led the process of evaluating ARACIS, recommending at the end of the process the inclusion of ARACIS in the European Registry for Quality Assurance, which was a significant step in gaining the status of ENQA membership, which occurred in 2009. ARACIS was considered to meet the ENQA criteria in terms of its activities, its official statute, independence and other aspects, while it did not fully meet the following criteria: the processes for external quality assurance, resources, the declaration of principles, the criteria and processes for external quality assurance used by members and the responsibility procedures (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2009, pp. 46–47). Regarding the latter, ENQA recommended ARACIS to continue its' efforts in these directions in order to achieve full conformity as fast as possible. Taking into consideration this example, it can be concluded that the process of shaping evaluation priorities and improving or adapting institutionalized evaluation structures is continuous and plays a role in the process of institutional strengthening.

2.2 Stage 2: Using a Participative Approach for Deciding the Appropriate Evaluation Model

Developing the evaluation capacity at the level of public systems implies the need of thinking from an evaluative point of view and improves the organizational and system learning processes through a participative approach. Introducing evaluative

activities in the usual practice of organizations requires the adoption of evaluation models, able to transpose this practice into a set of systematic activities, with a clear methodology and a useful purpose. Thus, the development of the evaluation capacity ensures "the design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies to help individuals, groups, and organizations, learn about what constitutes effective, useful, and professional evaluation practice", the final purpose being to create a "sustainable evaluation practice—where members continuously ask questions that matter, collect, analyze, and interpret data, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action" (Preskill and Boyle 2008). To this end, in order to support organizations, the analysis of several evaluation models and approaches from the specialized literature can be useful in order to select elements which will be included in the organizations' own model. What is more, there are in hand different checklists which have been designed especially for facilitating the process of evaluative practices to be more vastly used, such as "A Checklist for Building Organizational Evaluation Capacity" (Volkov and King 2007) and "Institutionalizing Evaluation Checklist" (Stufflebeam 2002).

A criticism that can be addressed concerning the way in which the practice of evaluation has been introduced in the education field is that the choice of evaluation approaches, models and methods often ignores the opinions of those who are part of the organization where this process is taking place. For example faculty members, in the case of university, or experts, in the case of agencies which have responsibilities in the educational policy making process are often excluded from the decisional process regarding the undertaking of an evaluation. This can result in a certain degree of rejection from these groups as a consequence of the insufficient relevance of the chosen approaches in relation to their role in the educational process (Nevo 2006). Continuing this line of thinking, the activities which are specific to evaluation can seem foreign or external to the agencies' field of activity if the experts within it are not consulted while choosing them and if they have nothing to say regarding the way in which evaluation activities will be integrated within their usual, day-to-day routine. For these reasons, but also for choosing an evaluation model which is as adapted as close as possible to the organizations' particularities and to the needs of individuals and teams which form it, it is fundamental that the choice of an evaluation model be based on a wide and informed debate at the organizations' level. This allows for the integration of the different needs of individuals, but also for them to become more easily accustomed to the new routine. In the case of the higher education system, however, routines can also become an impediment in the way of improving organizational performance and adapting to a dynamic environment. For example, in the case of universities, the Quality Barometers, which were conducted by ARACIS in order to present a subjective status analysis, show the fact that the internal evaluation of quality is a ritualistic and conformist routine, mostly decoupled from the managements processes within the university. This leads to the miming of standards, the dysfunctional transposition of norms into practices, the weak professionalization of internal evaluation commissions and the focus on entry values rather than on effectively increasing quality (Vlăsceanu et al. 2011; Păunescu et al. 2011). On the other hand,

routines can generate a framework for comparing the evolution of different policies and programs which leads some agencies within the system to establish their own evaluation model and customize specific instruments according to the characteristics of the implemented programs. For example, in the case of the National Agency for Community Programs for Education and Professional Development (ANPC-DEFP is the acronym in the Romanian language), program and projects evaluations highly depend on the approach, methods and practices which are used by the European Commission, DG Education and Culture, which are transposed to the agency's level by expert evaluators which it has selected.

Still, what are the fundamental elements which are the base of constructing or adapting an evaluation model? Which are the most frequent evaluation questions which agencies in the field of higher education should be taking into consideration including in their own model, in order to develop their own evaluation capacity and be able to answer to the evaluation needs and priorities? Different meta-approaches to evaluation tend to assign an increased importance to different functions of the evaluative process, for both formative or summative evaluation (Scriven 1967), responsive evaluation (Stake 1975), illuminative evaluation (Parlett and Hamilton 1977), utilization focused evaluation (Patton 1986), systematic evaluation (Rossi and Freeman 1985), constructivist evaluation (Guba and Lincoln 1989), goal-free evaluation (Scriven 1991), empowerment evaluation (Fetterman 1994), realist evaluation (Pawson and Tilley 1997) developmental evaluation, etc. All these approaches propose various selections of concepts, instruments, elements of design and roles and instances of the evaluator in order to achieve the emphasized function. But how can regulatory and executive higher education agencies distinguish and choose between all of these, in order to use an adequate evaluation model, which takes into account the system's constraints and conditions such as: quality assurance standards, various needs and values of the various stakeholders, scarce resources, institutional and organizational context? Given the sectors' dynamics and the multidirectional influences to which it is subjected (external conditions, the coherence with national and international strategic and reform lines, changes which are diffused from other sectors etc.), it is difficult for a single evaluation model to offer all and the most appropriate answers when evaluating an educational program, the effects of a reform package, organizational accountability or responsiveness etc. Thus, for each situation agencies can choose from a large number of combinations of different elements, dimensions and values which are useful for the evaluator, different methodological approaches, quantitative (surveys, large-scale analysis) and/or qualitative (in-depth interviews, public consultation, focus-groups). Though in some cases there will be an obvious predisposition towards choosing a certain method or a certain type of methods, the process of choosing or establishing the most adequate evaluation model might seem very confusing and stressful and could attract contradictory discussions, as well as resistance to change in the case of some organizations. However, this debate at the level of each agency about the ways in which they develop their evaluation capacity and they choose an evaluation model that they will integrate in the agencies' current activities, can also be very productive. Ultimately, it can build the strategy that the agency is going to follow in a

practical manner and create the basis of the decision of the evaluation model which will be chosen, having both an informative role, as well as a formative role for the experts which take part in the debate. The choices that are going to be made or which may be favoured by those who participate in the debate lead to the manifestation of a certain degree of subjectivity which is connected to various factors such as:

- values and preferences for certain approaches of methods;
- competences, skills, education;
- the way in which they interact and the intra and inter-organizational levels;
- the emitting of judgments regarding the quality of a policy or program;
- other elements which model their decision and that will guide them subsequently in the practice of evaluation activities.

This process is also connected with the way in which they or the activity of the organization which they are part of or of other organizations within the system with which they interact could be improved. All these elements help them understand why a certain decision has been made, why a certain alternative was implemented, why a certain action generated a specific effect, why an organization took a certain course of changing or adapting, why the response behaviour of an organization to a certain situation followed one pattern and not another. Eventually it could enable them to identify generalizable effectiveness models and the sense of an intervention. As a concluding remark, regulatory and executive higher education agencies have to ensure an open and participative environment for the most adequate evaluation approaches, methods and instruments to be chosen. Also, the choices made should be representative for the various stakeholders' needs and values.

2.3 Stage 3: Training Evaluation Skills

How can evaluation skills develop in bureaucratic routine-embedded systems? The need for training that agencies have to address consists in making managers and staff aware of the importance of using evaluations and also in giving them the practical tools for doing it. Training and capacity building is essential but putting the training process into practice is itself a challenge if there is a desire to introduce a new "routine" in the normal schedule of experts within an organization. This is why it is important that attending the training not be considered a boring and imposed activity. A major part is played by the two steps which were previously described, which offer on the one hand the an institutionalized function of the agency, which will become part of every staff members' current activity, and on the other hand the familiarization with elements which are specific to the practice of evaluation and consulting and integrating their own needs, values and opinions within the new activity. The various means through which evaluation skills can be formed at the level of organizations, both for staff and management, include:

Elaboration of agencies' own evaluation guidelines: offering written, explanatory and exemplifying materials which support training activities and which guide evaluation activities by taking into consideration the particularities of the activities which the organization carries out within the higher education system. In the context of deepening European integration, the instruments which are elaborated/adapted by organizations at the system level should lead to the adaptation to the multiannual financial programming principles, taking decisions according to Romania's needs, generating coherence with the EU's priorities, ensuring consultation in order to rank national priorities, initiatives for adapting and aligning the legislative support and instruments, strengthening the relevance of programming, stimulating risk awareness, initiatives that ensure the coherence of the institutional and normative system.

Brief presentations of concepts, guidelines and standards: theorists and practitioners can share their expertise with the organization members by presenting different approaches, concepts, models and methods which are specific to evaluation, adapting these to the organizations' evaluation priorities and to the changes that are taking place within the higher education system.

Interactive courses: discussion about the expectations regarding the results and the use of evaluation processes.

Workshops: interactive sessions during which participants are offered an extended participatory framework for dialogue and learning by carrying out team activities regarding the way in which evaluation instruments relate to the educational policies, programs or reforms implementation and their day-to-day activities.

Evaluation simulations: undertaking, in an organized environment, all the steps which need to be taken during each step of an evaluation cycle (contracting, preparation, evaluation design, implementation of the evaluation and reporting of the results) related to an educational program, policy or organization within the higher education system.

Pilot evaluation implementing and reporting: carrying out a pilot evaluation in a more narrow geographical or thematic area within the higher education system and discussing about it with decision makers in those areas. In the case of the higher education system in Romania in the 2006–2013 period most emphasis was placed on organizational evaluations from the perspective of the quality assurance dimension and these entailed conducting several national pilot evaluative exercises. As a consequence of these exercises in the year 2011 a comprehensive national exercise was conducted for establishing the hierarchy of study programs and for classifying higher education institutions. Furthermore, as a consequence of these evaluations at the system level, in the period 2012–2013, the European University Association is conducting a longitudinal institutional evaluation of 42 universities using its own methodology, which has been adapted and particularized to the specific characteristic of the higher education system in Romania. Of course, this latest national evaluation exercise could not have been successfully (efficiently and efficaciously) implemented if pilot and common exercises/learning activities had not been undertaken before the year 2011 regarding quality assurance. An interesting aspect is that after the exercise of ranking study programs, alternative

methodologies have been developed in order to create a comparative framework for the official hierarchy (Vîiu et al. 2012), thus diversifying the perspectives which are taken into account when such evaluation exercises are conducted.

Consultations regarding improving the agencies' own evaluation guidelines: regular initiatives to improve the channels for public consultation regarding the design of evaluations which should be undertaken both for organizational evaluation, as well as for the evaluation of the programs which have been implemented. For example, both UEFISCDI, as well as ANDCDEFP periodically carry out activities for increasing the awareness of the beneficiary and interested public regarding the achievement of specific objectives and the contribution towards achieving policies' objectives. They disseminate information regarding the economic and social impact and the coherence with the directions which are stated in strategic documents. They also organize public debate on results from the perspective of the contribution to the accomplishment of priorities.

Collaboration with universities for professional Master programs: developing specialized study programs and curriculum for evaluating policies, programs and organizations and adapting them to the students' profile. At present no public or private higher education institution offers a Master's program dedicated to higher education management which studies organizational evaluation in the higher education system. This component is instead treated as a subject in related programs such as: management and governance, educational management, the evaluation of public policies and programs, public policies, European integration etc. Furthermore, this subject is discussed in continuous professional training activities, which have taken place in the last few years as part of projects which were financed by the Human Resources Development Operational Sectorial Program 2007–2013. It is expected that in the next years universities which offer master's programs that are connected to the field of organizational evaluation will extend this framework of mutual cooperation and learning towards the specialized professional environment (professional associations, consortiums and companies which offer services for evaluation public policies and programs).

Apart from becoming familiar with specific elements from literature and the practice of evaluation, the training of experts within the agency should include the strengthening of their competencies in the use of social research models for evaluation activities. Thus, depending of the approaches that will be chosen and the selection of quantitative and/or qualitative methods, they can practice in workshops, simulations or pilot evaluations quantitative research activities such as social inquiries, surveys, etc. or qualitative research activities such as undertaking observations regarding the ways in which individuals work within the target organization, conducting in depth interview with decision makers which are responsible for the management and implementation of programs, document analysis, content analysis, root cause analysis etc. In the case of pilot evaluations, experts will have the possibility to approach evaluation results in an integrated manner and to validate them by soliciting feedback from the other organizations with which they will interact during the evaluation process. As a concluding remark, for the training process to be efficient and relevant to the training needs,

regulatory and executive higher education agencies could also take into consideration being open to involve the expertise of independent evaluators or training staff from another agencies within the system.

2.4 Stage 4: Routinising Evaluation and Continuously Reshaping Priorities

The routinization and redefining of the priorities in ECB entails the formation of a critical mass of individuals who will support the use and dissemination of evaluation practices, the reconceptualization of problems and of the solutions which are proposed, the analysis of the implementation's fluidity, the consistence, relevance and plausibility of changes, the persistence of problems in programming and implementation—aspects which have to be maintained/aspects which need to be modified, the utilization of experience and lessons which have been learned for new policies and programs in higher education. What is more, these steps should provide answers to the following question: what happens with the evaluation skills when the training, simulations and the pilot evaluations end? If the involvement of management and staff is reduced to short term engagements during training activities and they are not offered continuity through their involvement in on-going evaluation activities, it is very likely that the impact of evaluation capacity building strategies will be minimal, and that the new competencies which have been formed will not be used in the normal routines of the agencies. This is why the organization needs to offer its management and staff opportunities to practice evaluation by "developing tools, processes, and understandings about how new knowledge and skills are transferred to the everyday work of program staff and leaders" (Preskill 2013). Monitoring the degree of routinization of organizational evaluation can be achieved by using a matrix like the one which is presented in the table below. The matrix is structured on four levels of intensity, understanding, use and learning transfer (Table 1).

The essence of the ECB approach is that in the case of organizations which have already internalized a culture of evaluation, transforming evaluation into a routine and continuously reshaping priorities involves considering the readiness of participants, their motivations and expectations, organizational conditions, opportunities they may or may not have to use their new evaluation knowledge and skills, and the extent to which leaders encourage, coach, support, and resource their evaluation activities (Preskill and Boyle 2008). Thus, their staffs adopt a proactive behaviour when undertaking activities with an evaluative character. What is more, through the experience that they accumulate, managers and staff contribute to the dissemination of experience to other actors within the system, both through institutional transfer mechanisms, as well as through opportunities for becoming independent evaluators, as in the case of the Phare Universitas 2000 Program, as well as the Higher Education and Research Reform Program RO-4096. As a

Table 1 Levels of evaluation routinisation in organizations (authors)

Level	Understanding, use and learning transfer
High routinisation	There is a functional evaluation unit within the organization, which systematically and actively carries out evaluation activities and whose members are open to continuous professional development opportunities related to their work
	Staff and management members have a comprehensive understanding about evaluation concepts, models, methods, uses and functions, they have access to internal learning resources and share common knowledge and skills with those within the organizations and with experts from other organizations in the system
	Skills among management and staff are periodically assessed and continuously updated
	The contact of organization members with activities related to evaluation is frequent, being an integrated part of their work
	Evaluation activities are generally well conducted and implemented, and the difficulties which appear along the way are handled efficiently
	The evaluation findings are used for improving current activities of the organization, such as the implementation of policies or programs
	There is a stable evaluation budget at the organizational level, which is clearly delimited in the budgetary allocation, which is conceived based on evaluation priorities and is adequate for responding to the costs which are implied by evaluation activities
Intermediate routinisation	There is a functional evaluation unit within the organization, which periodically undertakes evaluation activities
	Staff and management members have a general understanding about evaluation concepts, models, methods, uses and functions
	The contact of organization members with activities related to evaluation is periodical, in order to respond to the major evaluation priorities
	Evaluation activities are implemented without any major problems, and the difficulties which appear along the way are generally well handled
	Evaluation findings are partially used for improving current activities of the organization
	The budget allocation for evaluation activities is included in the budgetary allocation for a wider range of activities within the organization
In progress routinisation	At a formal level an evaluation unit has been created within the organization and visible efforts are being made for it to become functional and active
	Staff and management members have a minimal understanding about evaluation concepts, models, methods, uses and functions
	The contact of organization members with activities related to evaluation is occasional, depending on the projects that will be implemented and which include an evaluation component
	The implementation of evaluation activities is faced with some problems which are more difficult to handle
	The evaluation findings are minimally used for improving current activities of the organization

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Level	Understanding, use and learning transfer
	The budget allocation for evaluation activities is occasional, depending on the budgets of projects that will be implemented and which include an evaluation component
Low routinisation	There is no structure specialized in evaluation within the organization
	Staff and management members have a poor understanding about evaluation concepts, models, methods, uses and functions
	The contact of organization members with activities related to evaluation is short and sporadic
	The implementation of evaluation activities is fractured, and major problems appear along the way
	The evaluation findings are not used for improving current activities of the organization
	There is no budget allocation for evaluation activities

conclusion for this stage, the process of transforming evaluation into a routine involves different levels of awareness and practices related to most relevant topics that managers and staff have to deal with for continuously improve their activity.

3 Conclusions

There is a growing need in the Romanian higher education system for identifying mechanisms for improving public policies and agencies' attributions in the decision making process, policy planning and implementation, regulation, control or mere executive functions. Introducing evaluative activities into the usual practice of organizations requires landmarks such as evaluation models, which are able to transpose this practice into a set of systematic activities, with a clear methodology and a useful purpose. We thus propose a logical framework for evaluation capacity building based on a cyclical model of shaping evaluation priorities and developing evaluation structures, selecting evaluation models, training evaluation skills, transforming evaluation into a routine, and reshaping evaluation priorities. The framework relies on the way in which evaluation practice can become a routine at the micro level (within the organization) through expert team learning and organizational learning processes and diffuses at macro level (within the system) through system learning and interactions at the system level. In spite of the fact that in the case of organizations within the higher education system in Romania, the ECB is not institutionalized yet as a current practice for improving the way in which programs are implemented, assumed objectives are reached, and the way in which services are offered, while presenting the steps of the logical framework, several relevant examples were offered which prove the fact that in certain regulatory and executive higher education agencies the practices which are specific to ECB are routinized and

are even gradually diffused towards other agencies and consultative organisms within the system, offering at the same time a context for mutual learning. Learning through evaluation means that the evaluation process does not end when the final results are identified, implying instead, a prospective thinking of the next period of programming and implementation making use of the knowledge and experience which have been gained, and, ultimately, restarting the evaluation cycle.

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Student Centred Learning: Translating Trans-National Commitments into Institutional Realities. The Romanian Experience

Liviu Matei, Cezar Mihai Hâj and Daniela Alexe

Keywords Student-centred learning · Bologna process · Teaching and learning · Learning outcomes · ECTS system · Teaching quality · Innovative teaching methods

1 Introduction

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The Bologna Process was launched in 1999 as a voluntary inter-governmental initiative aiming at the formation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). "Bologna" is both a transformation process of European higher education systems and a political institution (Reinalda 2008). As many researchers propose, the process can be viewed as a consequence of European integration, or as a proactive attempt of Europeanization of higher education systems. "Europeanization" in this context means more than just the expansion, or evolution of the European Union (Trodal 2002; Corbett 2003; Corbett 2005; Corbett 2006; Veiga 2005; Adelman 2009; Damme 2009). Pursuing a European integration agenda, the Bologna Process started as an intergovernmental initiative independent from the

L. Matei (✉)
Department of Public Policy, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
e-mail: mateil@ceu.hu

C.M. Hâj · D. Alexe
Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: cezar.haj@uefiscdi.ro

D. Alexe
e-mail: daniela.alexe@uefiscdi.ro

C.M. Hâj
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania

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European Union (it was not launched and it is not controlled by the EU, although the EU Commission is a formal member). Several countries that were not members of the Union signed the Bologna Declaration from the very beginning, and other non-EU countries quickly came to the conclusion that being inside the Bologna circle was more beneficial than being left out, which determined them to join later (Haskel 2009). The special nature of the Bologna Process, involving the participation of both EU and non-EU countries within the geographical area of the European Cultural Convention (47 at present altogether), and of the European Commission, shaped the evolvement of the overall process and influenced the actual course of the envisaged reforms in higher education.

Far from having a homogenous or linear impact in all signatory countries, the Bologna Process, as characterised above, had a varied but noticeable influence across European higher education systems. Part of this influence was possible given the fact that Bologna Process brought about new concepts, a new vocabulary, and also new policies, tools, and practices in higher education. The concept of SCL and associated policies and practices are an important illustration of this process, at least for the case of some countries in the European Higher Education Area.

The original development of the SCL concept (ESU 2010), is credited to Hayward (as early as 1905) and to Dewey's work (including posthumous publications after 1956). Carl Rogers expanded this approach into a theory of education in the 1980s. This approach to learning has also been associated with the work of Piaget (developmental learning) and Malcolm Knowles (self-directed learning). A review of the SCL literature resulted in the following characterisation of the concept: the reliance on "active rather than passive learning", an emphasis on "deep learning and understanding", "increased responsibility and accountability"of the student, encouraging an "increased sense of autonomy" for the learner, an "interdependence between teacher and learner", "mutual respect within the learner-teacher "relationship and a "reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process" on the part of both the teacher and the learner (LEA 2003).

SCL takes a broadly constructivist view as a theory of learning, built on the idea that learners must construct and reconstruct knowledge in order to learn effectively, with learning being most effective when, as part of an activity, the learner experiences constructing a meaningful result. Consequently, adequate teaching methods become an important part of this approach.

SCL is also connected to transformative learning, which takes into consideration a process of qualitative change in the learner, on an on-going basis, focusing on enhancing and empowering the learner and developing her/his critical thinking ability.

Efforts have been made, as part of the Bologna Process, to include SCL in the broad program of reforms of higher education. In turn, the on-going process of learner transformation and empowerment can be analysed within the Bologna Process, *inter alia*, with the help of other key "Bologna concepts", such as, Learning Outcomes and the ECTS.

1.2 General Overview

1.2.1 The Bologna Process in the European Context

The chief objective of the Bologna Process, the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), was to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe. The main "action lines" of the Process are reflected in the directions which, throughout the years, have represented official and explicit priorities of the Bologna Process. The list of action lines includes besides other areas such as social dimension, lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning, internationalization of education, mobility, quality assurance etc., a Student Centred Learning dimension as well.

Student-centred learning is rather a new concept and it has not been directly addressed at the beginning of the Bologna Process. Moreover, when SCL started being considered, it was not a separate action line, but rather regarded as a "transversal concept". With the adoption of the Leuven Communiqué, an increased emphasis has been placed on teaching and learning in higher education institutions, on curriculum reorganization, and on the introduction of learning outcomes as an instrument in the teaching process. In turn, this new focus brought about more attention to SCL: *student-centred education involves focusing on the learner, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures. The curriculum reform is a continuous process that will lead to high quality education trends, flexible and focused on the individual* (Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education 2009). The Leuven Communiqué talks about the impact of student-centred education on the development of student skills, which are considered necessary for a labour market that is in constant change, and also for the integration of students into society as active and responsible citizens. The most recent Bologna Ministerial Communiqué adopted in Bucharest established the stimulation of student-centred learning and of innovative learning methods as priorities for the next period in the European Higher Education Area (Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education 2012).

The present article considers the existence of a wide range of definitions given to the SCL. However, it specifically looks at the implementation of SCL in Romania using as a proxy the meaning of the concept ***as expressed in the Bologna commitments formulated in the Ministerial Communiqués***. In fact, for better or worse, the introduction of SCL in Romania is strictly related to the Bologna Process, with no other policy or conceptual references. In this regard, we have analysed the successive official Communiqués adopted during the Bologna Process in order to extract and resume the main commitments regarding SCL. They can be summarized as follows:

- The institutions should strike a connection between study credits, learning outcomes and student workload and include learning outcomes acquisition in the assessment procedures (Bucharest 2012);

- The commitment must be reiterated to promote student-centred education characterized by innovative teaching methods and by the involvement of students as active partners in their own education (Bucharest 2012);
- Higher education institutions should pay attention to improving the quality of teaching within the study programmes at all levels (Leuven 2009);
- Student centred education involves focusing on the learner, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures. The curriculum reform is a continuous process that will lead to high quality education trends, flexible and focused on the individual (Leuven 2009).

Based on this summary, this article will try to look at how higher education institutions in Romania, as a signatory country of these communiqués, understand the concept of SCL through ECTS, learning outcomes, student workload, innovative teaching methods and quality of teaching.

1.2.2 The Bologna Process in Romania

Romania signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, at the very beginning of the Process. Since then, Romania has voluntarily taken steps to align its higher education policies to the objectives and the policies promoted by Bologna. As a consequence, the higher education system in Romania has undergone a series of fundamental reforms, by adjusting legal procedures, promoting new national public policies, creating new institutional structures, regulations and guidelines for universities (UEFISCDI 2013).

The Bologna Process has been implemented in Romania in a context characterized first of all by one of the biggest increases in student population in Europe until 2008 (the number of bachelor students increased more than five times from 1990 to 2008). However, after 2008, student numbers began to rapidly decline. One can see the same trend in the evolution of the number of higher education institutions (both public and private): this number increased almost three times from 1990 to 2003, and from 2003 it started to decline. On the legal side, a new framework was adopted between 2004 and 2006 to allow for the implementation of the Bologna Process in Romanian universities (mainly linked to the introduction of the three cycle system, the ECTS, diploma supplement implementation and creation of new quality assurance arrangements).

The national institutions responsible with implementing the Bologna Process in Romania were: the Ministry of National Education (MEN), aided by its consultative bodies: the National Council for Higher Education Funding (CNFIS); the National Council for Research in Higher Education (CNCSIS - abolished with the adoption of the new Law of Education No. 1/2011); the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance (ARACIS); the National Agency for Qualifications (ANC); the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) and the Romanian Rectors' Conference (CNR), in close interaction with higher education institutions, national student federations and teachers' unions.

Between 2010 and 2012, in particular, Romania played an active role within the Bologna Process by organizing the 2012 Bologna Ministerial Conference, the Third Bologna Policy Forum, and by hosting the Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat (the Secretariat developed for the first time during this period a permanent EHEA website and a very useful online archive of Bologna policy documents).

1.3 The Context of This Article

The article is based on the work carried out by the authors within the project "Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania" implemented by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Innovation and Development Funding (UEFISCDI). The project undertook to systematically identify all commitments assumed by Romania within the Bologna Process and then to analyse their implementation, including those regarding SCL. Methodologically, the authors relied on extensive desk research that included gathering and analysing information about the national legal framework, gathering and analysing official documents of international and national institutions, as well as perception studies and research articles in the field of SCL. The most important legislative sources relevant for the current analysis were the Law of Education no.1/(2011) and the ARACIS methodology for institutional quality assurance assessments. In addition, seven focus groups were organized within the above mentioned project, with the participation of former and present Romanian representatives within various Bologna Process structures (BFUG, Working Groups, Networks), representatives of the national institutions that deal with the Bologna Process Implementation (ARACIS, CNFIS, ANPCDEFP, MEN), national experts and former representatives of the Romanian Bologna Secretariat (2010–2012).

The research about the implementation of the Bologna commitments in Romania was a ground-breaking effort (there is very little similar research in any other country of the European higher education area). When gathering information about this topic, regarding implementation aspects rather than just policy blueprints and generic frameworks, one realises that relevant data regarding the Romanian higher education system, both at system and institutional level, is hard to come by. We have been able, fortunately, to access two very useful and somewhat unexpected sources of information/data, which are directly relevant for the current analysis. One of these sources is the European University Association's institutional evaluation of Romanian universities, which includes a first and second wave of institutional reports (2012–2013). The second one consists of the institutional strategies made public on their official websites by the Romanian universities.

The European University Association (EUA), through its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), evaluated a large section of public Romanian universities: 41 public institutions were evaluated in 2012–2013. For the article, an analysis of 27 institutional reports was conducted. The analysed reports included 27 universities from two of the three university categories (research intensive universities and

teaching and research universities), according to the university classification in Romania. From the total number of available reports in the above mentioned two categories, military and arts universities' reports, were excluded due to their very specific characteristics which are not relevant for the general picture. Education-intensive universities, the third category in the Romanian context, were not included in the analysis, as the IEP reports were not yet public for all of them and the review process is still on-going.

Another source of information used in the analysis of the implementation on Bologna commitments with regard to SCL in Romania were the "strategic frameworks of universities", mainly for the period 2013–2016. Such strategic framework documents (published as "strategic plans", "development strategies", "managerial contracts", "managerial programmes", "strategies" etc.) were elaborated and adopted in the context of the election for the university leadership and Senate membership organised in 2012–2013. Thirty-three public universities' strategies were analysed. The strategic documents of the rest of sample institutions could not be found on their official web sites.

2 SCL in Romanian Higher Education System

2.1 Approaches to Student Centred Learning—from the National to the Institutional Level

In the process of mapping the national legislation on education, we found that a main chapter of the Law of education no. 1/(2011) is entitled the "student centred university". This chapter includes chiefly provisions regarding student rights at national and institutional level, student admission, data collection, financing, student services or student representation. There are no explicit mentions regarding SCL, but the chapter provides for the adoption of a "Student Rights and Obligations Code" (The Student Statute), in which further details are regulated. The Student Statute specifically describes the students' right to "benefit from SCL for personal development, integration into society and the development of skills to gain initial employment, to maintain it, and to be able to move within the labour market".

We have analysed the above mentioned reports from 27 public universities considering the Bologna commitments regarding SCL. We focused on the general institutional approach to student centred learning and on specific elements of SCL, namely: the situation regarding the implementation of learning outcomes at institutional level, the links between the ECTS system and the students' workload, the existence of innovative teaching methods and the approaches to enhancing quality of teaching.

As a general remark, in 11 institutional reports there is a mention regarding the limited awareness or partial understanding of the Bologna principles by the academic communities, referring either to Bologna policies in general, or to certain

commitments regarding SCL, ECTS, learning outcomes, or the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG). These remarks appear to indicate that even if the Bologna action lines have been implemented at national level, not all the subsequent policies are internalised at institutional level. Oftentimes they are implemented only in a formal way, simply as a consequence of national regulations.

Analysing the 27 institutional reports regarding the general approach of universities to SCL, four groups could be identified:

1. Universities with not even a single reference to SCL in their reports. Even though teaching was included in the IEP evaluation guidelines, five reports were identified in which no reference to SCL was made.
2. Universities with no institutional approach to SCL. In nine cases, the reports mention that ***there is no*** institutional approach to SCL. The reports either did not identify a SCL framework, or the evaluators did not find real evidence of SCL implementation. In these cases the main recommendation formulated by the external review panels was for the respective institutions to start by adopting a SCL philosophy. The recommendation is detailed in some reports by formulating more specific guidelines, such as: reduce behind-the-desk teaching in favour of a more practical, hands-on approach; accurately use ECTS, as both a measure for student workload and learning outcomes; design a more flexible curriculum including optional courses to allow for individualised learning pathways; develop a student-centred curriculum; information provisions for students should contain an explanation of the overall aims and purposes of the courses; adopt clear guidelines on written and project work; adopt clear principles on performance assessment, marking and feedback to students; adopt a learning outcomes approach.
3. Universities with some elements of SCL. The third category, in which six universities are included, can be described as: "some elements of a SCL are being implemented, but further efforts need to be done". The recommendations included in the external reports can be understood as referring to the so-called second level of SCL implementation - promoting active learning among students and placing a greater emphasis on the development of transversal competences and skills.
4. Universities in which clear commitments exist and efforts are made towards SCL. Seven institutions could be included in this category. The conclusions of the evaluations mention in these cases that "departments have made sustained efforts to develop student centred learning", or "commitments have been made to a student-centred approach and to the use of a variety of teaching methods to ensure high standards of student learning". A good-practice example was mentioned: one university prepared written guidelines for teachers regarding SCL.

Considering that in 15 universities there was no evidence of SCL or there were only some elements in place, while in seven universities serious efforts were identified, one particular conclusion regarding SCL stood up in the reports. This

conclusion might be relevant for the higher education system in Romania in general. It states that "it is not sure to what extent the concept of student-centred learning is clearly understood and perceived in Romania and to what extent it is a constituent part of the current reform". The review panels have identified in only two of the universities under review the existence of a strategic approach to SCL. For ten institutions the review panels recommended that a teaching and learning strategy should be developed to further the implementation of SCL principles.

2.1.1 Strategic Institutional Approaches to SCL—A View to the Future

Taking into account Romania's commitments regarding SCL within the Bologna Process, we will analyse in what follows how Romanian higher education institutions refer to SCL in their strategic documents and how they understand and operationalize the concept, encompassing, *inter alia*, ECTS, learning outcomes, student workload, innovative teaching methods, and quality of teaching.

We have analysed the SCL plans and commitments for the future, as reflected in the university strategies for the immediately next period (mainly 2013–2016).

The first finding is that 20 out of 33 universities have clear statements (including general or specific objectives) regarding the implementation of SCL. For the remaining universities, no reference to SCL was found for the near future.

A second finding is that in some cases SCL seems to be defined, rather paradoxically, through a "teacher-centred" approach. This is reflected, for example, in the inclusion in the university strategy for the next period of the objective of "enhancing the activities of information transfer in the context of SCL". This approach was also noticed in one of the IEP evaluation reports, in which the Romanian HE system as a whole is characterised by a continuing focus on ***information transfer*** (belonging to the traditional methods of teaching), rather than on the ***learning process***.

Going further, for the case of the 20 universities with clear statements on SCL, we have analysed how the SCL commitments have been operationalized within institutional strategies. We tried to identify if any clear measures were envisaged, subscribed to the concept of SCL as defined within the Bologna Process. We found that that there is quite a diverse range of measures within the universities, as described below. In three cases, the only measure envisaged is a study to be undertaken, or proposal to be developed by an internal university unit or structure of the way in which SCL could or will be operationalized within the institution.

The most frequently mentioned measure in these university strategic documents is related to changes in the teaching methods, referring either to the adoption of new, innovative teaching methods, or to adaptation of the existing teaching methods to the SCL concept (six cases). The second most common measure is the involvement of students in research activities (five cases). The third most common measures (with four appearances) refer to enhancing quality assurance procedures for teaching processes, and to the adaptation of curriculum to the socio-economic needs of the community. Other measures mentioned are: involving students in the

course assessment; the development of a mentoring system in order to enhance the collaboration between teachers and students; consistently defining, using and assessing learning outcomes within the teaching and learning processes; enhancing the practical experience of students; the active involvement of students in the academic process; reforming the curriculum; developing social services; encouraging students' academic performance; the development of soft skills and others.

Comparing the Bologna proposed approach to SCL with the measures proposed in the strategic frameworks of these Romanian universities that do include SCL in their strategic planning, we can conclude that even though in several universities some Bologna SCL commitments are indeed reflected in institutional strategies, the majority of institutions have their own understanding of SCL. Another general remark is that SCL remains a concept under which each university "uploads" different domestic objectives that have nothing to do with what is broadly understood as SCL in the European context (for example, employing students in the university or planning activities for alumni). It appears that, similar to other loose concepts diffused by European-level (Bologna) policy processes, such as like lifelong learning or the social dimension of education, in Romania SCL became an umbrella concept under which institutions can push their own specific domestic agendas, while retaining the legitimacy of European reform models.

2.2 The Link Between Learning Outcomes (LO) and ECTS in the Context of SCL

According to Ecclestone, learning outcomes can be defined as being something that students can do now at the end of a unit of learning (e.g. course) and they could not do previously (Ecclestone 1995). Thus, learning outcomes can be regarded as changes within a person as a result of a learning experience. In order to be able to use learning outcomes within higher education, it is important to link them with assessment: assessment must be both possible and appropriate. The desired learning outcomes of higher education courses must be therefore not only relevant, they must also be clearly stated and assessable (Watson 2002).

In Romania, the Law of Education no. 1/(2011) defines learning outcomes as: what a person understands, knows and is capable to do after finishing a learning process; they are expressed through knowledge, abilities and competences, and are acquired through different formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. The law also defines the assessment, validation, transfer, recognition and certification of learning outcomes. There is no link made in the Law between learning outcomes and the ECTS system.

According to the Methodology of Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education (NQF), the grids introduced in the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education (CNCIS) for each study programme include the description of the programme in terms of learning outcomes. The first

grid makes reference to professional skills, transversal abilities, knowledge and skills, while the second connects the respective skills with the allocation of study credits for each skill and per field of study.

Out of 27 evaluation reports prepared for the IEP, in the case of seven universities there are no references regarding the learning outcomes. Based on these reports, the main conclusion is that learning outcomes are indeed formally defined at institutional level (mainly due to the fact that they are legally required), but they are not fully implemented, and not in a coherent and integrated way across the institutions, in accordance with the Bologna Process or with the ECTS Users' Guide. This conclusion is also supported by other main findings from 18 universities: "learning outcomes were mainly used to satisfy returns and specifications required by ARACIS, rather than as effective tools for programme delivery"; "while emphasis is placed on setting objectives and identifying competences, knowledge, and skills, this still falls short of a learning outcomes approach".

The findings of the reports, where mentions were found, lead to one main conclusion regarding the assessment of learning outcomes (although expressed in various ways): assessment procedures are not aligned with learning outcomes.

In the majority of cases, the IEP external reports recommendations in the area of learning outcomes refer basically to the need to introduce and develop a learning outcome approach at institutional level, bearing in mind the wide span of possible educational objectives.

Two particular issues were signalled in the EUA IEP reports as being present in the majority of Romanian universities: the need for skills development and also for developing the practical experience of students. In this regard, in 15 cases the reports state the lack of or the insufficient opportunities for student internships. The Romanian legislation mentions the obligation for practical experience to be embedded in the curriculum, but universities are not always able to facilitate internships for all the students (often they offer a limited number of internships and the rest of students are supposed to find internships by themselves). In only six cases there are recommendations for providing "soft skills" development to students, because the dominant tendency is to develop and assess knowledge and specialised skills at the expense of the so-called transversal or soft skills (some examples are mentioned in the reports, for example public speaking, presentation skills, writing academic papers, team work and others).

In the ECTS system, the formulation of learning outcomes is meant to be the basis for how the workload is estimated and hence for credit allocation. When those responsible for designing educational programmes establish the qualification profile and the expected learning outcomes of the programme and its components, it is intended that ECTS credits help them to be realistic about the necessary workload and to choose learning, teaching and assessment strategies wisely (European Commision 2009). The ECTS system is implemented in Romania and the Law of Education provides the following definition for this type of credits: "the amount of directed and independent intellectual work required for the student's individual completion of a course unit within an academic study programme, complemented by validation of learning outcomes" (Article 148). Looking at the law, one can see

that the amount of intellectual work equivalent to an ECTS credit point is not quantified. However, a set of regulations is imposed by the Education Law regarding the number of ECTS in a more general framework:

(2) The individual intellectual work of a student cannot be lower than that corresponding to an annual number of 60 transferable study credits.

(3) The minimum number of credits needed to pass the academic year is established by the university senate.

(4) The duration of the Bachelor and Master academic study programmes, by areas of specialization, shall be proposed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and approved through Government decision.

(5) The total cumulated duration of the Bachelor and Master academic cycles of studies corresponds to obtaining at least 300 transferable study credits.

(6) The number of transferable study credits for the doctoral cycle of studies is determined by each university, depending on scientific or artistic field.

In accordance with the Education Law, art. 148, the ECTS system should be implemented by taking into account the amount of work that the student must perform in order to receive the credits and reach the learning outcomes quantified by the credits earned. The ECTS credits should help both to quantify the acquired knowledge, competencies and abilities, and to facilitate mobility. In another words, credits should have both a transfer and an accumulation function. The number of gained credits represents a criterion for promotion from one cycle to another and from one academic year to another. There are additional academic filters for transition from one cycle to another, according to the decisions of universities.

No studies have been identified to confirm the efficiency and comparability of the ECTS in Romanian universities. There seem to be no published studies that look at the relationship between the allocation of ECTS credits, learning outcomes, and student workload either. The IEP reports do not tackle in particular the subject of ECTS implementation in Romania, but some references have been found regarding this subject in six university reports. The main conclusion is that, even if universities have been implementing the ECTS for more than 10 years, this process was mostly superficial and formalistic, rather than representing a real reform, which would have encompassed linking ECTS credits with student workload and learning outcomes. Inconsistencies were found between ECTS and professions governed by Professional Qualifications Directive 2005/36/EC in one university. One recommendation with clear reference to the ECTS system was to "review students' workloads and ECTS to ensure that workloads are manageable".

2.3 Looking at the SCL in the Context of Teaching Quality of Teaching

ARACIS is the independent institution responsible for quality assurance in higher education at national level. The standards upon which ARACIS assesses each institution and study programme have a great impact on institutional policies, as

well as on their strategic behaviour. We have analysed the ARACIS methodology to see whether national quality assurance policies promote SCL and, if this is the case, they follow the Bologna Process commitments regarding SCL.

The ARACIS methodology includes an indicator named "**student-centred learning methods**." In this case, the minimum required standard (mandatory for each institution) is detailed to include the following:

- "The main responsibility of the academic staff is to design student-centred learning methods and environments, with less emphasis on the traditional responsibility of solely transmitting information;
- The relationship between student and academic staff is one of partnership;
- Learning outcomes are explained and discussed with students in terms of their relevance to their development;
- Academic staff members use new technology resources and auxiliary materials, from the blackboard to flipchart and video projector;" (ARACIS, 2006)

The other standards represent guidelines for universities and are not mandatory:

- "Academic staff members are specially trained in teaching and/or they meet up in discussion groups to discuss teaching methodology; The trainings also include: teaching skills, experience in counselling, monitoring and facilitating the learning process;
- There is an on-going activity of identification, development, testing, implementation and evaluation of effective learning techniques;
- Study programmes are integrated with trainings, placement and internship and with the involvement of the students in research projects;
- The teaching methods includes asking questions in the classroom, short presentations, demonstration experiments;
- The teaching strategy also takes into account the needs of disabled students.
- The institution creates learning environments and experiences that lead students to discover and create knowledge themselves." (ARACIS, 2006)

It is evident from the quotes above that the national quality assurance methodology explicitly includes SCL and that its provisions are in line with the Bologna Process promoted policies. On the other hand, it is difficult to assess the real impact of these provisions in the ARACIS methodology.

References to quality assurance procedures related to teaching were identified in the IEP evaluation reports. In eight out of 27 universities no quality assurance procedures for teaching were found or no significant effort was identified in this direction. Systematic efforts to secure and develop quality teaching were identified in only two universities. The main recommendation in this field was that Quality Assurance Departments should play a more central role in the reporting loop on the quality of teaching and learning.

2.3.1 Innovative Teaching Methods or Learning Centred Teaching

Distinctions are drawn in the specialised literature among different kinds of learning, such as 'understanding', 'factual knowledge' and 'skills', but also among different kinds of learners, such as 'holist' and 'serialist' learners, 'visualizers', 'verbalizers' and'doers', so that teaching methods can be matched to them. Learning-centred teaching involves adopting different teaching methods, where they are appropriate, adapting them to the needs of each student instead of following a one-size-fit-all instrument (Sparkes 1999).

In the context of SCL, the role of teachers becomes as important as it can get, given that teachers have to identify how they can help students to acquire the intended learning outcomes and benefit to the fullest from a specific learning experience (Alexander and Murphy 1998). The main function of teaching is often understood in terms of enhancing effective learning and empowering the student to become responsible for her/his learning process. Good teaching involves, among others, matching teaching methods to students' chosen learning goals, while also catering for students' different preferred learning styles. 'Learning-centred teaching' is an organized way of teaching and learning, which embraces student-centred learning, active and problem-based learning and the use of IT, as well as instruction and demonstration by a teacher, wherever they are appropriate (Sparkes 1999). It identifies where 'the sage on the stage' is a valid teaching technique and where 'the guide on the side' may be more appropriate. It is generally believed that student-centred teaching allows students to take on more responsibility for deciding what and how to learn so that they can play an active role in their education, thereby achieving higher-level learning outcomes, such as knowledge application and creation. Siding with the student-centred camp, constructivist teaching is an alternative to the conventional teacher-centred teaching method (Yuen and Hau 2006).

For the purpose of the present study we have analysed the implementation in Romania of the particular commitment within the Bologna Process also for the specific areas of development of and focus on innovative teaching methods. When talking about "innovative teaching methods" we mainly consider the references from the Bologna Process which include: involving students as active participants in their own learning process, creating a supportive and inspiring working and learning environment, empowering students to develop intellectual independence, personal self-assurance alongside disciplinary knowledge and skills, ability to assess situations and critical thinking.

To be able to implement innovative teaching methods, well-prepared and motivated teaching staff is needed, and an adequate ***number*** of academic staff members is necessary. According to the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), at the beginning of the academic year 2010–2011 the total number of students and the number of academic staff members in Romanian higher education were as follows (Table 1):

At the beginning of the academic year 2011/2012, the average ratio of academic staff members to students was about 1/33 (public universities and private universities). There are significant difference between public universities and private

Table 1 Number of students and number of academic staff members in public and private universities, NIS 2012

Public				Private			
Academic members	4,118	Bachelor	399,464	Academic members	453	Bachelor	140,388
Associate Academic members	4,592	Master	110,299	Associate Academic members	727	Master	20,780
Assistant Academic members/Lecturers	7,547	Doctorate	23,311	Assistant Academic members/Lecturers	1,676	Doctorate	229
Research Academic members	6,630	Total	533,074	Research Academic members	958	Total	161,397
Adjuncts	1,142			Adjuncts	173		
Consultants	226			Consultants	6		
Warrant officers	117			Warrant Officers			
Total	24,372			Total	3,993		

universities. At the beginning of the academic year 2011/2012, the average ratio of academic members to students was:

- 1/22 in state universities;
- 1/40 in private universities.

The analysis based on the IEP evaluation reports indicates that the main issue regarding the teaching staff identified in 18 universities is the lack of incentives and instruments for both developing teaching competences, and motivating and fostering innovation in teaching. The existent universities structures (e.g. the departments for training of teaching staff) do not possess the necessary expertise and resources for teacher training, especially in innovative methods, or for implementing Bologna desiderata in teaching and learning more generally, such as learning outcomes-based teaching and assessment, and student-centred learning. For 12 universities the main recommendation was that teacher training should be made available to the teaching staff and that mechanisms for sharing good practice in teaching should be put in place. Also, the IEP evaluation reports noted that there is an imbalance between the multiple rewards given for excellence research, on one side, and the lack of rewards for innovation and excellence in teaching, on the other. This situation is reflected, among others, in the processes of hiring staff and promotion of teachers. A recommendation made for eight universities by the IEP review panels was to develop instruments and methods of rewarding teaching performance. They could include: using initiatives like "the best teacher of the year", setting up a University Learning and Teaching Enhancement Forum, establishing a Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), developing a system of awards and rewards both for individuals (teachers, researchers and students) and academic units that demonstrate excellence in teaching.

At a more general level, an important conclusion emerging from the analysis of the institutional reports is that a certain level of conflict can be seen between research and teaching in the Romanian universities, with two distinct aspects. On one hand there is a situation in which many teachers concentrate more, or mainly, on research (especially young teachers), while neglecting the teaching dimension of their activity. On the other hand, in some cases the teaching workload is so heavy that it leaves little room for research activity.

Other issues related to teaching staff mentioned in the reports are: significant constraints on universities resulting from national regulations, especially regarding the recruitment and promotion of academic staff; salary incentives can be awarded to recognise excellent performance in research, but no teaching excellence or innovation in teaching. The current follow-up of the performance evaluation of the academic staff is mainly based on person-to-person discussions and is not backed by any resources that would recognize and stimulate performance in teaching. The current method of funding for teachers, based on contact hours, has a disproportionate influence on curriculum design and may be a disincentive to curriculum reform.

What is also important in order to provide a supportive learning environment is that classrooms are properly equipped. From this perspective, analysing the data

obtained in the classification of universities, it is noteworthy that 33 % of university classrooms in Romania are equipped with a video projector, 70 % have at least one PC and 53 % have wireless internet access.

Out of 27 reports IEP reports, 12 include clear mentions regarding teaching methods. In this regard, in ten universities the main conclusion was that the teaching methods remain mainly traditional. In only two universities an innovative approach to teaching was identified.

The main issues identified in the institutions with a traditional teaching methods were: some members of academic staff appear to have outdated approaches to learning, teaching and assessment; often professors are self-centred in the sense that their teaching is based on the need to justify teacher contact time rather than on the learning needs of students; the presence of one-way lecturing, involving the lack of interactivity in classes and making student feel that courses are irrelevant and outdated. In these cases the main recommendation was to move away from traditional approaches and to adopt more learner-centred pedagogies across all disciplines, together with developing innovative learning methods, like case studies, case competitions, simulation exercises, business games, criterion-referenced assessment techniques, use of technology or greater prominence to pedagogical innovativeness and effectiveness.

One example of good practice regarding the use of technology as a means to promote innovative teaching was identified: the development and use of e-platforms for teaching. Although there are many universities using this tool in their day-to-day activities, in many cases it appears to be an instrument used rather for administrative reasons or, at most, as channels of information and communication, rather than for learning properly. One university was identified which has succeeded in implementing a platform that includes direct access to academic and research related material pertinent to the students' specific activities and specialities, student evaluations, and efficient teacher-student communication instruments.

2.4 Stakeholders Perception Regarding SCL Implementation

According to the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR) study concerning students' views on the implementation of the Bologna Process (2009), involving 23 universities, "in only 15 % of universities the student organisations consider that the academic staff have adapted to the needs of students." With regard to the evaluation of the academic staff by students, the same study concluded: "In over 61 % of universities, students' feedback is not taken into consideration, and no measures are taken as a follow-up to the results. Only in 22 % of universities the feedback is taken into account in the educational activity". Overall, according to the same study, the perception of student organizations regarding the implementation of SCL in Romanian universities is that: "Even though at the national level there is a tendency to adapt teaching methods to

students' needs, this phenomenon is in its infancy, therefore we shall categorize the concept *of student-centred learning* as being poorly implemented." (ANOSR 2009).

The "Quality Barometer" (ARACIS 2010), a study released periodically by ARACIS, concluded in its 2010 issue that: "We have a rather self-centred university preoccupied by its own financial survival, students are the utmost important from a quantitative perspective, as carriers of financial resources". This study further details that:

- Romanian higher education **is student-centred at a formal level, through the university mission statements and charters**, but this formal claim is not supported by adequate learning outcomes of students and graduates;
- There is a difference between the students' expectations regarding the outcomes of higher education and what universities can offer in terms of skills' development.

  In order to promote student-centred education in universities and to help shape an SCL culture at the national level, ANOSR organizes the annual "Gala of the Bologna Professor," a project in which students evaluate and acknowledge academic staff members that are promoters of student-centred education. The methodology for assessment is based on indicators resulting from the operationalization of the student-centred learning concept from a student perspective, and includes:
- Learner-focused teaching methods (including the active participation of students),
- The outcomes of the course are focused on gaining specific competences, not on unidirectional information transmission,
- The use of technology within teaching and learning methods (via emails, group discussions, open electronic resources, webinars etc.),
- A collaborative teacher-student relationship.

This initiative represents a rare incentive for Romanian teachers to enhance their pedagogical methods and be more innovative and responsive to the profile of current learners. In the 2007–2012 timeframe, 400 teachers from all over the country have been awarded the 'Bologna Teacher' label and in this way a "community of practice" started to be formed.

3 Conclusions

Romania signed the Bologna Declaration 15 years ago and is implementing the Bologna principles and action lines ever since. Nevertheless, it appears that a limited awareness or partial understanding of the Bologna principles by the academic communities is found in the majority of universities. This appears to be the case with all core commitments within the Bologna Process, including the implementation of the ECTS system or of learning outcomes. SCL was only recently

introduced in the Bologna vocabulary and mentioned in the Bologna Process communiqués (the first attempt being made only in 2009). SCL is used as an umbrella concept at the national and institutional levels, under which various unrelated domestic interests are being gathered.

Even though the SCL concept is not operationalized in the national law on education, the national procedures for quality assurance do provide clear guidelines for SCL implementation. Yet, when analysing institutional behaviour, we found that there is no common understanding of the concept, and no consistent implementation. The main policy rationales for SCL do not appear to be internalized at institutional level.

The understanding of the SCL concept is diverse within and across different categories of stakeholders. At institutional level, this understanding includes certain aspects that are indeed consistent with the model promoted by the Bologna Process documents and reflecting "Bologna commitments" (for example aspects regarding new teaching methods or new approaches to quality of teaching). At the same time, under the label of "Bologna reforms", this understanding also includes aspects that are exterior or only collateral to the Bologna promoted model (such as the involvement of students in research activities or employing students in the university). The inclusion within the SCL legitimation frame of issues and aspects that are clearly unrelated or lack a significant relationship with SCL indicate the lack of basic common understanding of what SCL means in the Romanian context.

SCL policy setting and implementation in Romanian universities are still at the beginning. Some universities are more advanced than others. We have identified universities with no declared approach to SCL, universities with some elements of SCL, and universities with real commitments and doing real work towards SCL. The fact that only 41 % from the institutions (considered for the purpose of this study) do not have a formal institutional approach to SCL suggests that there is a need for further policy development in this area, as well as for public debates on what is understood and assumed by the concept, and on what would be useful to do in practice in this area, beyond the formal commitments as part of the Bologna Process. In fact, the Bologna Process commitments with regard to SCL should represent a good opportunity for a serious deliberation at national and institutional level about the virtues, and perhaps limitations as well, of SCL.

Looking at the implementation of a learning outcomes approach as an essential part of SCL, we can conclude that due to national regulations (included in the National Qualification Framework and the quality assurance procedures), learning outcomes started to be used in the description of study programmes. This use appears to be rather formal for the time being. Learning outcomes are not internalized as core elements along the entire teaching and learning process, including initiation, design, operation, student assessment, and quality assurance of study programmes. Significant further development appears necessary, in particular, in the area of learning outcomes assessment.

The present study confirmed two other important problematic aspects, already acknowledged by other researchers, policy makers, university leaders and student representatives: the lack of focus on soft skills development and assessment, and on

students practice. The tendency to develop and assess subject-specific knowledge, at the expense of transversal or soft skills or the insufficient opportunities for internships represent issues that require a coherent national and institutional strategic approach for identifying policy solutions.

Regarding the ECTS system, after several years of implementation in Romanian universities, there is still no data available regarding the correlation of ECTS with student workloads or learning outcomes.

Looking at the matter of innovative teaching methods, and more generally at the matter of developing supportive and inspiring learning environments for students, we conclude that there is a lack of incentives and instruments for teacher training, mainly due to the lack of university expertise and resources in this area.

A certain level of conflict appears to be in place between teaching and research. This is due to several factors, including high teaching workloads, but also due to the insufficient number of teaching staff (at national level the ratio of teachers to students appears to be 1/33 in state universities and 1/40 in private universities). The lack of recognition for good teaching and, more generally, the absence of incentives for good teaching is also a factor.

As a final conclusion, based on the analysis of the IEP reports, of the strategic documents of universities and of national perception studies, it appears that approximately 40 % of Romanian universities express no formal commitment to introduce a student centred learning approach. Academic communities do not appear to be convinced of the usefulness or appropriateness of moving towards SCL in the Romanian context. In addition, even though 60 % of universities did choose to include SCL in their strategic approach, at least at formal level, many universities "uploaded" into the concept diverse unrelated domestic objectives, while excluding essential components, such as focusing on learning outcomes, pedagogies reforms or embedding indicators referring to the teaching process within quality assurance procedures.

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Data Used

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Internationalisation of Higher Education in Romanian National and Institutional Contexts

Ligia Deca, Eva Egron-Polak and Cristina Ramona Fiţ

Keywords Internationalisation · Higher education · Bologna process · Policies · Data · Mobility · Students · Institutions · Universities · Romania

Abbreviations

ACBS	The Agency for Students Loans and Scholarships
ANPCDEFP	The National Agency for Community Programs in Education and Professional Training
ARACIS	The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
DS	Diploma supplement label
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EUA	European Universities Association
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IAU	International Association of Universities
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MEN	Ministry of National Education
NIS	National Institute for Statistics
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UEFISCDI	Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding

L. Deca (✉)
University of Luxembourg, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), Luxembourg City, Luxembourg
e-mail: ligia.deca@uni.lu

E. Egron-Polak
International Association of Universities (IAU), Paris, France
e-mail: e.egronpolak@iau-aiu.net

C.R. Fiţ
Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: cristina.fit@uefiscdi.ro

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1 Introduction

1.1 General Context and Rationale

According to the EUA Trends VI study (2010), 'internationalisation has been identified by higher education institutions as the third, most important change driver in the past three years and is expected to move to first place within the next five years' (EUA 2010). Also, according to the third IAU Global Survey on Internationalisation, the importance of this policy area has been growing over the past several years (IAU Global Survey 2010). Furthermore, the European Commission released a Communication on the internationalisation of higher education, titled *European Higher Education in the World*, on 11 July 2013, that encourages both the member states and the HEIs in the European Union to develop comprehensive internationalisation strategies. Such strategies, according to the Communication, should embrace student and staff mobility, internationalisation of curricula and strategic academic partnerships as integrated elements. At EU level, funding incentives and policy support, through the EU's new Erasmus + Programme within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2014–2020, are promised in support of the new policy direction. The Erasmus + Programme is also one of the few EU programmes that has actually seen a substantial increase in terms of its financial support by EU.

As a member of the EHEA, Romania has committed to implementing the 'EHEA in a Global Setting' Strategy (London 2007) and the 'Mobility for Better Learning' Strategy (Bucharest 2012), which points to the need to have a strategic approach to internationalisation, both at the national and at the university level. Furthermore, Romanian Education Law 1/2011 introduced a series of reforms aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the Romanian higher education system (with provisions on what a university charter should contain regarding international partnerships, incentives for joint degrees, guaranteeing the principle of free movement of students, members of the academic staff and researchers, etc.). Looking at the rhetoric around this topic present in national level policy documents,[1] the Romanian view on internationalisation seems to be highly influenced by the imbalance between incoming and outgoing mobile students and academic staff (e.g. for every incoming student, there are three outwardly mobile students), which is seen to lead to the need for increasing the attractiveness of the national higher education system.

In this context, the '*Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania'* project was designed to analyse the way in which five Romanian universities developed their internationalisation priorities and strategies, while also looking at how the national legal and policy contexts foster this dimension. The present article aims to outline the commonalities and differences in the approaches to internationalise their activities and develop strategies to

[1] See Chap. 3 for more details.

this aim employed by universities with different missions, in the same national context. Furthermore, the conclusion will also touch on what specific elements of internationalisation are favoured by Romanian universities and provide some recommendations developed by the project experts' team for advancing the institutional and national activities in this field.

1.2 Methodology

The article relies on the research conducted on internationalisation within the '*Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania'* project. The analysis encompasses both the national policy environment and a review of institutional policies and practices on internationalisation.

For the institutional analysis included in the present article, the authors used the findings of a comparative mapping of both university websites and strategic documents (university strategies and operational plans) for 92 public and private Romanian universities, as well as an in-depth review of institutional policies and practices for five case study universities, based on detailed self-assessment reports and site visits carried out by teams of experts.

In the course of the desktop research phase, national legal and strategic documents were analysed, as well as official position documents of national actors and international institutions. Data was gathered and analysed from a large array of institutions, including the National Institute for Statistics (NIS), Ministry of National Education (MEN), the National Agency for Community Programs in Education and Professional Training (ANPCDEFP), the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), etc.

The institutional self-assessment reports were developed using the same self-assessment instrument for all institutions in the sample. This instrument was based on a version initially developed by the International Association of Universities (IAU) and revised in 2012 for the purpose of the UEFISCDI project mentioned above. This ensured its fitness for purpose and its relevance within the Romanian higher education context. The study visits included semi-structured interviews conducted by the expert panel with relevant university representatives and stakeholders (rectors, senate members, administrative staff, teachers and students). The sample of universities included institutions with different profiles (public and private, from Bucharest and other university centres). Following the study visits, a focus group with institutional representatives and experts involved in the case study reviews was organised, in order to test the conclusions of the analysis.

The direct involvement of the authors of the present article in the project, as well as their different experiences with the subject, provide a unique perspective on internationalisation policies at both national and institutional level, which contributed to anchoring the conclusions of the article in international, national and institutional realities.

2 Internationalisation—Theoretical Considerations and Main Trends

2.1 The Concept of Internationalisation

Internationalisation has come to encompass so many meanings and activities that it proves difficult to make sure that members of a specific academic community have more or less a common understanding of what this concept may or can entail. Jane Knight describes internationalisation as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight 2008, p. XIX). In this understanding, which is also used in the present article, it is a process with two main related components – "internationalisation at home" and "internationalisation abroad" (Knight 2008, p. 14). Internationalisation at home includes various institutional strategies and instruments to enhance students' international understanding and intercultural skills, while internationalisation abroad comprises, inter alia, cross-border mobility of students, teachers, researchers, as well as programmes, courses, and projects.

Another widely used definition of internationalisation is that employed by the OECD, according to Pricopie et al., the OECD describes internationalisation as "the totality of processes whose combined effect, planned or not, is to ensure the international dimension of higher education experience in universities and similar educational institutions" (Pricopie 2011, p. 9).

Internationalisation is, however, not an aim in itself, but a way to ensure that higher education responds to a growing need for openness and cooperation, continuously enhances its quality and responds to the increasingly global challenges (Qiang 2003, de Wit 2011).

Not only can rationales for internationalisation of higher education be quite different in their nature (political, economic, social/cultural and academic), but various stakeholders may also have different rationales for pursuing their interests in this field (IAU 2012). Rationales may change over time and are of course not mutually exclusive. An understanding of the rationales for internationalisation can also help frame different approaches that policies and institutions may adopt.

The diversification of rationales for internationalisation has both been brought about by and created new challenges for higher education systems and institutions: the decrease in funding for the educational sector, affecting countries differently; the increased competition between institutions, also caused by the growing importance of national and international rankings in categorising and comparing institutions, and which some prospective students use in making their choice for a higher education programme; the increased demand for the use of English in research and teaching and its implications for national cultural and linguistic heritage; and the increased competition among major international companies aiming to attract well prepared graduates. These are some of the leading external factors that impact on the internationalisation strategies currently being developed. At present, the top three rationales listed for internationalisation by HEIs are improving student

preparedness for a globalized/internationalised world, internationalising the curriculum and improving academic quality, and enhancing an institution's international profile and reputation (IAU 2010).

Yet, in some parts of the world and in some institutions, perceptions regarding internationalisation have been changing in the recent past and some approaches are at times highly criticised. This is due to the fact that in some cases, internationalisation can be characterised as:

- shifting from cooperation for "capacity building" to cooperation in order to create alliances to advance in the global competition;
- shifting from an approach that offered students access to programmes unavailable to them at home, towards a focus on attracting the best and the brightest students to one's institution;
- shifting from solidarity and collaboration-based academic partnerships to "strategic partnerships linked to economic and geopolitical goals";
- a tendency for higher education institutions to put more emphasis on prestige and positioning in rankings than on providing their students with as diverse an internationalisation experience as possible. (Egron-Polak 2012)

Internationalisation of higher education is not a new concept for Romanian universities, but its (re)formulation as a comprehensive process, mainstreamed within the overall university strategy and activities is still underway. In the past two and a half decades, higher education reforms inspired by European or international developments had a negative legitimation in Romania, based on the negative impact of not implementing policies that decision-makers claimed were transferred from international levels (Wodak 2010). It is thus natural that sometimes the benefits of adopting internationalisation in a comprehensive way are not immediately obvious to institutional actors.

Clearly in its evolution, "internationalisation" has gained multiple meanings and there are various ways in which it is interpreted and pursued in different contexts around the world. Moreover, there are both positive and less positive effects and consequences of the process of internationalisation and these were taken into account when looking at internationalisation of higher education at both national and institutional level within the Romanian context.

2.2 Internationalisation Policies in Europe: The Bologna Process and EU Policies

2.2.1 Internationalisation Developments in the Bologna Process

Within the European context, internationalisation of higher education has been a major concern for policy makers and this became manifest when EHEA Ministers adopted first in 2007 the 'EHEA in a Global Setting Strategy' and in 2012 the

'Mobility for Better Learning' Strategy. It is worth remembering that the Bologna Process started with Bologna Declaration of 1999 that is in itself a manifestation of the need, as well as joint efforts by governments, the private sector and higher education, to reform higher education in Europe toward becoming more competitive in the global knowledge economy.

It can be argued that the Bologna Process includes Europeanisation, as a form of internationalisation, as one of its main goals. From the start, this inter-governmental voluntary initiative intended to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education and to foster student mobility. Conscious of the fact that the first decade of the present millennium has given rise to new challenges, the EHEA ministers, gathered at Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009, broadly stated the issues that need to be addressed in a changing environment. One of the political goals adopted for the EHEA to be achieved by 2020 is ensuring that at least 20 % of those graduating in the EHEA have had a study or training period abroad.

The 2007 'EHEA in a Global Setting Strategy' outlined the following main priorities:

- improving information on the European Higher Education Area;
- promoting European Higher Education to enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness,
- intensifying policy dialogue,
- strengthening cooperation based on partnership and
- furthering the recognition of qualifications.

Following five years of implementation, the EHEA ministers decided to deepen the initial objectives, by adopting the 2020 Mobility Strategy in Bucharest (2012). Among the very clear messages that the strategy sends, the following ministerial commitments are particularly relevant to the current analysis: develop and implement national internationalisation and mobility strategies in all EHEA countries (which include clear objectives and targets), work for better balanced mobility across the EHEA, expand mobility funding and provide a wider portability of grants and loans, improve the recognition process based on the existing Bologna Process tools, as well as the use quality assurance and transparency instruments to promote quality mobility inside and outside EHEA.

The strategy also specifies the measures that need to be adopted by higher education institutions in the EHEA. It calls for universities to build their own internationalisation strategy and to promote mobility considering their profile while involving stakeholders, particularly students, teachers, researchers and other staff.

2.2.2 EU Policies on Internationalisation

Since EU has always looked at internationalisation as only taking place outside of its borders, EU policies have always been circumscribed to the goal of making Europe competitive on the global scale. Higher education and research are seen as key sectors in the strategy to make Europe more able to respond to global

challenges. As the EU Council underlined in the conclusions on the internationalisation of higher education (Council of the European Union 2010) released in May 2010: "International cooperation in higher education is an important and rewarding area which deserves support at both national and EU level" (Council of the European Union 2010). The Council also called on the European Commission, inter alia, to develop a EU international higher education strategy. The "European higher education in the world" Communication from the European Commission was therefore released on the 11 July 2013 in response to the Council conclusions of May 2010 on the internationalisation of higher education.

The Communication aims to clarify the EU approach to internationalisation of higher education. It underlines the key priorities that higher education institutions and member states should have in mind to increase their internationalisation activities and highlights the specific actions that the EU will take to support internationalisation and the next steps. A key focus of the document is the need for comprehensive internationalisation strategies at the national and institutional level that should, in the view of the European Commission, cover three main areas: promotion of international mobility for students and staff; promotion of internationalisation at home and digital learning and last, but not least, strengthening strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building. Detailed policy guidance is provided on how to deepen each of the three areas at national level, while remaining in sync with EU priorities. (European Commission 2013).

The EU committed to provide consistent financial support through the new programmes Erasmus + and Horizon 2020 for students, staff and researcher mobility, as well as internationalisation activities - such as joint degree programmes (master and doctoral) developed by international university consortia, strategic partnerships for cooperation and innovation and capacity-building partnerships between EU and non-EU higher education institutions.

In brief, it seems all European level policy guidelines in this field insist that the best way forward is for national authorities to provide a comprehensive policy framework for higher education institutions to pursue internationalisation.

The next section will briefly look at how internationalisation was understood in the Romanian higher education context and, based on this understanding, how its components were implemented at the national and institutional level. For the purpose of this article, internationalisation of higher education is seen as a multifaceted process, which includes, but is not limited to, partnerships and cooperation, mobility of students and staff, internationalisation of the curriculum and campus life and institutional communication and promotion. It is not restricted in geographical terms to an intra- or an extra- European outlook, and takes into account Romania's commitments as both an EHEA and EU members. These dimensions were analysed at the institutional level, as the self-assessment instrument covered these areas for all case study universities. Internationalisation of research was not considered for the purpose of this article, since internationalisation in this sector relies on a different set of national policies and international commitments (in the frame of the European Research Area) and a full account of both dimensions would have been

too extensive for the present contribution. Nevertheless, the authors fully recognise the importance of research internationalisation in the overall national and institutional internationalisation policies.

3 Internationalisation of Education in the Romanian Context

3.1 National Perspectives on Internationalisation of Higher Education

3.1.1 Policy Milestones and General Data Regarding Internationalisation of Higher Education in Romania

Currently, Romania has no overall internationalisation or mobility strategy (Ulrich Teichler 2011). In the past decades however, decision-makers promoted various policy instruments. Pre-1989, Romania combined foreign affairs priorities with higher education policies and strengthened mobility and cooperation with African, Asian and South American countries. The reduced fees, special programmes and student services, as well as the promotion of Romanian higher education in those regions generated an all-time high number of foreign students enrolled in Romanian universities who represented approx. 10 % of the overall student numbers in 1981, for example.

In the first decade of transition after the fall of the communist regime, Romania underwent a series of deep reforms, which enhanced the autonomy of higher education institutions while opening up to the private higher education providers. In its pre-EU accession period, Romania focused on swiftly adopting the European discourse and using the EU tools in order to prove that the national higher education system was ready, willing and able to be integrated into the European family. Chapter 18 (Education, Training and Youth) of the negotiation for Romania to become an EU member was one of the first six opened in early 2000 and among the first to be considered finalised (already in May 2000).

The Ministry of Education made a series of references to mobility and internationalisation in its 2002–2010 Strategy for the Romanian higher education system (Ministry of Education 2002–2010), such as aligning to the Bologna degree system, adoption of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and Diploma Supplement Label (DS), more participation in EU programmes—Socrates II and Leonardo da Vinci II, continued cooperation with francophone countries through AUF and the need for the Ministry to support universities in establishing more international contacts and partnerships. In the Romanian Post-accession Strategy (Ministry of National Education 2007–2012), it is stated explicitly that one of the priorities represents the contribution to the 'European knowledge-based society' by enhancing the international skills of higher education graduates. One of

the proposed indicators for achieving this goal was the number of mobile students, staff and researchers.

The Strategy Education and Research for a Knowledge Society (2009–2015) (Presidency 2009–2015), developed by the Presidential Committee for Education mentions the need to increase the attractiveness of Romanian higher education in general and of Romanian universities in particular. Various reports on the state of Romanian higher education, published annually by the Ministry of Education re-iterate the European commitments that Romania made in the frame of the Bologna Process (such as one in five graduates to have an international experience) or within EU-related areas (participation in ERASMUS and ERASMUS MUNDUS programmes, etc.). (Ministry of National Education 2010).

Finally, the Law on National Education, adopted in January 2011, mentions for the first time the principle of free movement of the members of academic communities and indicates the rationale for introducing transparency instruments such as the university classification—an effort to make the Romanian system more readable for European partners.

After looking at the policy history on this topic, the question is whether the current policy framework is seen by universities as sufficient to help them pursue internationalisation strategies and whether the overall goals set by Romanian policy makers have been achieved or can be achieved with the current instruments.

The next section looks at the national status quo of two internationalisation components: international partnerships and student and staff mobility. The same elements will also be analysed from the institutional perspective, together with other dimensions that can only be meaningfully analysed at the institutional level, in light of university autonomy namely: internationalisation of the curriculum and campus life, institutional communication and promotion.

3.1.2 Main International Partnerships

The main types of international partnerships in which Romanian universities are involved are Erasmus, CEEPUS, Fulbright, DAAD, Francophone area related programmes and various bilateral agreements. According to the Ministry of National Education website there are approximately 200 bilateral collaboration documents with almost 100 partner-states in the education field (Ministry of National Education). The main partner countries with which the Romanian government has signed bilateral agreements in order to provide scholarships for the academic year 2013–2014 are: Moldova, China, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Egypt, Greece, India, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Poland, Russia, Korea, Serbia and Turkmenistan. The total number of partnerships in which Romania's institutions were involved either as lead partner or as partner was of 853 in 2010 (9 % more than in 2006). It is difficult to identify the area or domains specifically covered by these partnerships, their number, or whether or not they are active, since there is no centralised data at national level on this topic. However, looking at the analysed case studies, one can say that partnerships between HEIs are mainly signed for

mobility purposes (especially Erasmus for academic or internship mobility) or for research. In this context, it is also difficult to draw a parallel between the next chapter looking at student mobility and the current one, since it is not obvious whether there is a direct link between institutional efforts to conclude partnerships and mobility flows.

3.1.3 Student Mobility

During the communist regime, the number of foreign students studying in Romania began to rise. At that time, Romania was among the top 15 countries in the world in terms of hosting foreign students and providing them with academic services, with 1981 being the peak year for Romania. In the last years of the communist regime the numbers of foreign students suffered a considerably reduction (Remus Pricopie 2011). Starting with the '1990s, foreign students in Romania began having a more diverse background, since Romania signed new bilateral agreements with many countries from Europe, as well as with Canada and the USA. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education started putting into place measures specifically targeted towards the internationalisation of education by launching study programmes (in domains like medicine, political sciences, engineering, public administration) in internationally used languages such as English, German, French or Hungarian. Additionally, in 1996, Romania joined the SOCRATES Programme with an important component—Erasmus. Since 1991 the Romanian Government has continuously encouraged students from the Republic of Moldova (Basarabia) to study in Romania by offering them targeted scholarships, as part of its larger foreign policy strategy.

In terms of student mobility statistics, it is important to highlight that at the national level, Romania does not have a clear record of students who have benefited by a mobility period. There are various reports, studies and statistical series based on different definitions of mobility, but there is no centralised database with the student numbers and countries in which they experienced academic mobility. In Romania there are at least two data sets regarding mobility: one is the data set based on numbers provided by universities participating in the data collection process for the university classification and study programs ranking (published in May 2011) and the other one is the data collected by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS).

When looking at the most recent NIS available data, the total number of foreign students studying in Romania (students enrolled in Romania, Erasmus, bilateral partnerships) reached 15,391 in 2009 (1.4 % from the total number of students), most of them originating from Europe, Asia and Africa. However, when looking at the Erasmus figures, the number of incoming mobile students is three times smaller than the number of outgoing students with this program (UEFISCDI 2013). According to data collected as part of university classification process in the academic year 2009–2010, the number of incoming students in Romania was 1,359 for all levels of study, while the number of outgoing mobile students for at least 3 months was 4,768 in all levels of study. As for degree mobility, according to

UNESCO Institute of Statistics, in 2011–2012 there were approximately 26,000 Romanian students who chose to study in other countries and 10,903 foreign students who came for an entire cycle to Romania. These figures show that the number of incoming students for degree mobility is 2.4 times lower than that of outgoing students for an entire study cycle. In this context, Romania can be seen as an exporting country in terms of student mobility, which raises concerns regarding the "brain drain" phenomenon since there is no available data concerning the number of returning students.

In 2011–2012, the top destination countries for Romanian students who chose to take a short study mobility period are France, Spain, Italy, Germany and Portugal. Regarding the choice of country for full degree mobility, students preferred Spain, Italy, UK, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden. Foreign students originate mostly from the Republic of Moldova (Romanian ethnics), Israel, Tunisia, France, Greece and Germany.

The highest number of student mobility is recorded at bachelor level. Language proximity and the existence of Romanian ethnic communities in certain countries seem to influence the preference of both incoming and outgoing mobile students.

3.1.4 Academic Staff Mobility

The ANPCDEFP report from 2012 (ANPCDEFP 2012) concludes that there were 1268 outgoing mobile staff members with teaching assignments and 709 staff members that were mobile for training purposes in the academic year 2011–2012. According to 2012 ANPCDEFP report, the estimated participation rate of teachers to Erasmus mobility is 7 % and the main countries preferred by academic staff for mobility periods abroad were France, Italy, Hungary, Germany and Spain.

As for the incoming members of the academic staff, available data has been identified only for the undergraduate cycle and for the academic year 2009–2010. The number of teaching staff and scientific research staff attracted from universities abroad for teaching activities (for a period corresponding to at least one semester) was 554 in 2010, according to the data from the Romanian universities' classification process. No central overview concerning the origin countries was identified at national level.

As staff mobility is a central multiplication factor for enhancing student mobility, as well as a central objective for increasing the attractiveness of the Romanian higher education system, the current low system performance both in terms of sending academic staff abroad and attracting international members of staff to Romania can be seen as another area in need of immediate attention in order to enhance internationalisation of higher education in Romania.

3.2 Internationalisation of Higher Education at the University Level

When analysing the internationalisation of universities, six particular aspects have been looked at: strategic and institutional framework, partnerships and cooperation, student and staff mobility, internationalisation of the curriculum and campus life, as well as institutional communication and promotion. As mentioned before, these components were selected based on the self-assessment instrument used for the case studies and the areas which were most mentioned by sample universities when talking about internationalisation of higher education.

3.2.1 Comparative Analysis of the Strategic Institutional Framework

Following a qualitative analysis of strategies and operational plans from 92 public and private universities in Romania, it was found that:

- at least 15 universities have not yet established a department of international relations in the organisational chart or the department was not identified on the official websites;
- 43 higher education institutions have either vague or no information on institutional strategies for internationalisation and mobility;
- an additional 30 universities mention internationalisation of education, mobility and partnerships in general terms, but there is no comprehensive strategy with concrete targets;
- only 19, about one fifth of the universities had set detailed objectives and concrete references in regard to the internationalisation of higher education.

The case of Romania was described by Ferencz and Wächter (2012) as an unusual one: the policy framework 'evolved' from a very well-articulated strategy with regard to internationalisation and mobility in the '1970s to virtually no overall strategy. Policy-makers claim that this is a consequence of institutional autonomy, but clear and increasingly numerous examples of countries that successfully combine national level policy with institutional strategies developed by independent and autonomous institutions make this claim highly questionable.

Moreover, based on the five Romanian university case studies, it can be concluded that Romanian universities are primarily focused on mobility and institutional partnerships, while other aspects of internationalisation are dealt with in a more ad hoc manner. When questioned about their main goals related to internationalisation of education, most case study universities indicated: the increase of incoming and outgoing mobility for students and academic staff, the establishment or development of more international partnerships, increasing and diversifying the number of courses and programmes taught in foreign languages and the increase of cooperation within university networks.

However, there is a discrepancy between what institutions declare as their main goals and what receives focus and appropriate support. None of the case study institutions had a specific budget for internationalisation activities and only one university from the case study institutions presented a concrete institutional strategy for internationalisation to the experts' panel. The others stated that they were in the process of developing one.

3.2.2 Partnerships and Cooperation

Although one of the main internationalisation goals of Romanian universities is increasing the number of institutional partnerships, their focus seems to be the quantitative increase of collaborations with other universities and not the strategic pursuit of active and sustainable long-term partnerships. This conclusions stems from the fact that more than half of the case study universities' partnerships are inactive or only partially active. Universities admitted that they see no need to end the inactive partnerships; the advantages of prestige, for example, of keeping them on their lists outweighed any disadvantage that could have been caused by retaining inactive partnerships to either themselves or the involved HEIs partners. Moreover, several institutions expressed their hope to see these collaboration revived in the next future. Also, when asked about the existence of strategic partnerships or regions with which they want to collaborate, most universities admitted that they do not have strategic areas specifically targeted for new collaborations.

Most of the institutions collaborate with universities and organisations from Europe and some of them are prioritising cooperation with Asia and China, in particular. The most common rationale for developing new partnerships is the desire to be part of strong networks or to carry forward individual connections of academic staff members. Other motivational factors for developing partnerships, as reported by universities (UEFISCDI 2013) include the need for international visibility within the professional community and the rewards arising from the ongoing dialogue with partners which showed that there are mutual elements to be learnt and shared on teaching and research in order to fulfil a common goal (training human resources, developing practical knowledge and skills). Few institutions report having discussions about the value and importance of deepening the existing partnerships, in contrast to the general drive for an increasing number of partnerships and cooperation. Where deepening existing cooperation is discussed, the focus is on developing joint and double degree programmes, international conferences or other activities in collaboration with their international partners.

3.2.3 International Students, Faculty and Staff Mobility

When analysing mobility trends, the case study universities pointed to the small numbers of incoming students and academic staff, which they perceived as a sign of the need to focus more on measures making the university more attractive. For most

universities, the number of outgoing students or academic staff is (significantly) higher, and only a few HEIs manage to achieve balanced inward - outward mobility flows. According to the university case study reports (UEFISCDI 2013) the percentage of international foreign students ranged from 0.5 to 4 % of the total student population for the 2012–2013 academic year. Most frequently these foreign students were enrolled via Erasmus programme or inter-institutional agreements and were at Bachelor level. Although in most cases, universities indicated that they have specific targets for incoming and outgoing students, these targets did not seem to be officially adopted by the institutions since they did not presented any official document.

The analysis highlighted that although universities would like to increase the number of incoming foreign students, the vast majority do not have a coherent strategy in place that could include advertising the institution's academic programmes, foreign language /joint degrees programmes or communicating its unique selling points. For example, there was more willingness to attract students from Asia or non-EU countries, since there is no legal provision regarding the maximum tuition fee limit, and thus this is seen as a potentially important source of income. National policy seems to also influence the preferences of universities for students originating from the Republic of Moldova, since specific administrative and financial conditions are offered by the Romanian state.

In terms of outgoing mobility, universities report having as a goal the increase in the number of home students going abroad. It was recognised that there are still several issues making outgoing mobility a difficult endeavour in some cases. These include recognition of the academic credits earned upon return and the lack of financial support, since the Erasmus scholarships were considered to be too low to cover all the expenses incurred. Top country destinations for Romanian students are France, Italy and Germany and outward ERASMUS mobility seems to take place mainly at the Bachelor level, similarly as in the case of incoming mobility.

No specific priority regions for outgoing mobility were identified in the case study sample. Apart from European destinations and depending on the existing partnerships and university profiles, China and other Asian countries are certainly becoming part of the institutional leadership focus, as in other parts of the world.

The obstacles for incoming mobility indicated by the interviewed students and academic staff are the language barrier, visa issues, recognition of foreign credits or diplomas for both incoming and outgoing mobility. Specifically for the outgoing students the low financial support constitutes a significant obstacle. Financial limitations also take their toll in making it more difficult for institutions to pursue comprehensive internationalisation strategies, especially with the current restraints at national level.[2] There is one notable and important exception in terms of

[2] Due to economic crises, the Romanian government only allows hiring 1 new staff member for every 7 that leave public institutions. Legislation to this effect was released in 2010 and all positions were partially unlocked in 2013. Law 69/2010, art. 10, alin. (6), letter c).

financing international activities, as most institutions provide funding for academic staff to participate in international conferences and some even provide financial incentives for those who publish articles in international journals.

3.2.4 Institutional Communication and Promotion

When it comes to the issue of communication within and outside the university concerning internationalisation, it was noted that most universities do not have a full-fledged communication strategy in place and relatively few methods (such as official website, posters, Erasmus brochures, newsletters or monthly meetings with students or academic staff) are being used in order to advertise programmes and opportunities or to disseminate information related to their own international activities. Few universities organise an "Erasmus Day", "International Days" or similar events every year meant to advertise mobility programs and international collaboration. There are also universities where no information on promoting their programmes to foreign students is available on their websites.

When analysing the websites of the 92 Romanian universities, 63 % did not have the website fully available in at least one language of international circulation. However, the members of the academic community did not raise this issue during the site visits, although international attractiveness of institutions is high on the agenda for all sample universities.

The communication between institutional leadership and the academic staff was considered by some of those interviewed as rather insufficient in regards to the internationalisation process. Opinions about internationalisation of higher education differ between the senior representatives and academic staff members. There are cases when the senior management does not pay as much attention to the subject as the academic staff considers necessary and vice versa, the representatives of management or the Department for International Relations reported that when they wish to develop specific activities that can only be undertaken with support from the academic and administrative staff, the support is not available.

For most of the visited institutions, academic staff members reported having no autonomy to pursue international activities. They can make proposals related to measures and activities that are subsequently discussed and analysed by the Council of Administration. Should such proposals be validated, actions are taken for their implementation. The most common method for internal communication are monthly meetings between senior administrators and faculty members also including, in several cases, student representatives. Since no institutional strategies for internationalisation were identified in most case study universities, this makes initiatives in the area quite time uncertain and time-consuming for those who initiate them, unless they are among the university leadership representatives.

3.2.5 Internationalisation of the Curriculum and Campus Life

When discussing the internationalisation of the curriculum and campus life in Romanian universities, the interviewees pointed to problems such as the lack of a shared understanding of the concept of internationalisation in the academic community, poor English language skills among the academic and administrative staff, academic courses not being harmonised with international trends and new research and course materials not being adapted or translated in the language of instruction, when the programme is available in a foreign language. A common concern was the relative lack of foreign language abilities amongst administration and to a lesser extent within the members of the teaching staff.

International orientation of the curricula was seen differently from one institution to the next. Some of the case study institutions declared that all of their programmes were international, whilst others declared that 30 % or less of their programmes had an international orientation. None of institutions taking part in the project pointed to a set of specific learning outcomes that were identified, monitored and evaluated as part of an international outlook of the curricula.

The majority of the case study institutions had a small number (four or less) of undergraduate programmes taught in English . Some also had subjects available in French, German and Italian. Almost all institutions indicated that their students were required to take foreign language courses as part of their study programme, with the majority also noting that the ability to use at least one foreign language was a precondition for graduation. Foreign language classes for disciplinary knowledge, in particular English, were commonly available to students, as well as extra-curricular foreign language lessons. However, most institutions did not offer foreign language training to members of the academic and non-academic staff. In all cases the number of incoming foreign teachers was 1 % or less, with some institutions stating that they had no foreign staff at all. In universities where international faculty members were present, they were provided with Romanian language training and/or community activities designed to make their integration into the university life easier.

Some of the case study institutions reported good cooperation with student organisations, which actively contributed to their international efforts. These organisations bring added value to the university by preparing specific events or activities to improve integration of foreign students or reintegrate domestic ones into the academic environment. At campus level, most foreign students share dormitories with Romanian students, which also contributes to the overall student integration process. Additionally, all institutions mentioned that they had organised a number of international conferences in the past year, either at faculty or institutional level, as a vector for international visibility.

4 Conclusions—Internationalisation of Universities "Where to" for Romania?

Romania is a country where internationalisation of higher education has had an interesting history, linked to a set of specific historical economic and foreign policies in the 1970–1980s, as well as with the European integration processes in the last two decades. Its linguistic affinities also influence policies and developments in this domain as exemplified by the links with other Francophone countries which are naturally prioritised. According to the existing data, Romania suffers from the brain drain phenomenon, especially in certain specific disciplines (medical studies, IT etc.) and this impacts on the perceptions and policy priorities of internationalisation.

Despite this context and the overall preoccupation with internationalisation at both state and institutional levels, Romania does not have a national strategy regarding internationalisation of higher education, nor do current higher education policy documents include clear priorities for this process, even though internationalisation is mentioned as a national priority of the higher education system in general terms. In addition, there is a chronic lack of available data regarding some of the key indicators of internationalisation of higher education, even in areas where Romania provides regular reports to European bodies, such as mobility of students and staff. The only policy, which stands out in terms of coherence, support and cooperation among governmental actors, is that referring to ethnic Romanians.

In the absence of a coherent national policy on internationalisation, the ways and means in which universities have pursued internationalisation differ widely, highly influenced by their mission and overall capacity. There is no shared understanding of this process and its importance for the future of higher education in Romania beyond a relatively small group of higher education leaders and academics.

Romania does not have a comprehensive overview of country-level bilateral or multilateral cooperation partnerships; there is no comprehensive database regarding the number of mobile students and academic staff, their country of origin or other relevant data. The perception of the participants in the focus group meetings was that the efforts of departments and agencies such as MEN, MAE, CNRED, ANPCDEFP, UEFISCDI, ACBS are largely un-coordinated and disconnected, and that this might hamper rather than facilitate institutional level internationalisation efforts, as well as the development of national level operational goals, plans and programmes.

Based on both the analysis of strategic documents for the 92 institutions, as well as on the conclusions of the study visits, it became obvious that a significant number of Romanian universities do not have internationalisation strategies nor clear references to internationalisation in their overall strategies, although they recognise the importance of the process. This might also be linked to the lack of a national debate about the concept and the potential benefits of a strategic national wide approach. Furthermore, there is an uneven understanding among the universities about the ways in which internationalisation can be an instrument to improve quality, respond to local and international needs and serve other academic and socio-economic goals. Thus the general approach to internationalisation is rather ad

hoc, with most institutions (and much of the discussion) focusing on mobility and institutional partnerships, rather than taking a more comprehensive view that encompasses, for example, internationalisation of curricula, recognition matters and building links between international research collaboration and other international initiatives.

The national tendency to point to the lack of attractiveness of the Romanian HE system as a key obstacle to increased internationalisation seems to be reflected in the internationalization goals adopted by Romanian institutions. These are mainly linked to attracting more foreign (preferably non-EU/EEA) fee paying students and to increasing the number of inter-institutional partnerships, as it is in these areas that the issue of attractiveness has the greatest impact. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that there is a trend, whenever possible, to pursue institutional partnerships only with well renowned universities that can bring institutional prestige and many are based on personal connections of some members of the academic staff, even though many of them become inactive quite soon after they are initiated.

Mobility imbalances are evident for the analysed universities and they fully reflect the national situation. Universities are mainly focusing on attracting students from abroad, including fee-paying third country foreign students. In the context of scarce financial resources, it appears that a more commercial approach to student mobility is becoming predominant, reducing the focus on other internationalisation aspects. Current legal provisions are also seen to be hindering university autonomy to pursue internationalisation policies (e.g. hiring international staff) especially in the absence of a strategy in this field at the national level.[3]

Other barriers to internationalisation which stood out in the analysis of both national and institutional realities were: the instability and incoherence of the education legislation which prevents institutions from planning and executing their internationalisation strategy, administrative bottle necks (visa regulations), the lack of sufficient foreign language proficiency of both academic and administrative staff, academic recognition issues which mostly hamper student mobility and inadequate information and promotion tools, including university websites not available in other languages. Generally speaking, communication and intra-institutional collaboration needs to be strengthened to bring about better top-down and bottom-up coordination, which appeared to be lacking according to the research results.

The way in which internationalisation efforts are financed was unclear at both national and institutional level. None of the case study institutions had a special fund for internationalisation activities. And since there is no strategic document on this topic at national level, it is hard to quantify the resources that may be allocated by the state for different programmes.

[3] Under the agreement of the Romanian government with the International Monetary Fund, Romanian public institutions have frozen the hiring processes with the possibility of hiring one person for every seven persons that leave the institutional staff, thus making it difficult to make progress in terms of attracting new staff at the administrative level.

Notwithstanding all these challenges, unique selling points and strengths of the Romanian universities were also identified during this study. First, some programmes offered are renowned for their quality and recognition abroad. These include the international programmes in medicine and dentistry, archaeology, IT, maritime studies or foreign languages. These programmes have very good infrastructure and for the most part, graduates enjoy high levels of employability. Secondly, several universities from the sample were proactive in developing partnerships with important companies (such as Microsoft, NYK, Siemens etc.), in order to provide internships for students and adapt the curricula to the labour market, while also taking into account the European and international trends. Furthermore, the geographical position of Romania offers possibilities for different institutional partnerships, strategic research and scientific international projects and exchanges. Good university facilities, inexpensive student accommodations and low cost of living in comparison with other European countries are also strengths that the Romanian higher education institutions have identified during this study.

Although universities are aware of their strengths, unique selling points and weaknesses, their internationalisation approaches appear not to focus on developing their potential or on finding ways to diminish their shortcomings as well as they could. The strategies used by universities are mostly reactive to immediate opportunities and existing European or national initiatives and less targeted to the specific profile and mission of the institution. They are also largely focused on a very narrow slice of the internationalisation process, somewhat disconnected from the pursuit of the overall institutional goals.

Perhaps one general conclusion that can be drawn from this study and the discussions with numerous Romanian stakeholders is that if Romanian higher education institutions, and the system more generally, is to become more internationally open and strengthen its participation in the internationalisation process, it must adopt a more coherent and deliberate approach at the national level, since this will facilitate the development of more proactive internationalisation strategies at the institutional level as well. Developing such a clear national policy, accompanied by measures and support, including financial support, would go a long way to overcoming the significant hurdles that stand in the way of various internationalisation goals. Even if universities were to identify clear goals and establish their own internationalisation strategies to reach them, these hurdles include the fragmented legal and institutional framework, and internally, the lack of common understanding of the rationale for internationalisation within the academic communities and the top-down methods used in pursuing its goals. The combination of mutually reinforcing internationalisation strategies at national and institutional levels may not be a panacea to overcome all obstacles but their development can be an important agenda setting and highly mobilizing process. The new set of EU programmes under the Erasmus + umbrella should also encourage, inter alia, the setting-up of joint degrees or the pursuit of strategic partnerships, and the grant applications are likely to be more successful and more pertinent if they can be based on existing national and institutional internationalisation policies.

Thus future work at both national and institutional level is needed and could be tremendously beneficial, especially if it takes as its starting point a real examination of the rationale(s) for internationalisation in the specific national and institutional contexts, includes the setting of realistic goals, the identification of implementation actions, the commitment of financial and policy supports and mechanisms to monitor what is happening in this field in Europe and while also paying attention to international trends. Internationalisation is a continuously evolving concept, so universities need to engage in continuous analysing of their approaches, in accordance with their vision and targeted objectives. Based on the institutional analysis, as well as on Romania's strategic interests and strengths, a national policy framework could effectively support internationalisation of Romanian higher education, not as a goal in itself, but as a way to enhance quality higher education for the Romanian society.

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Data from ARACIS.
Data from UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

Are the Talents Wisely Spent? The Case of Student Subsidies in Romanian Higher Education

Viorel Proteasa and Adrian Miroiu

Keywords Equity · Quality · Student subsidies · Distributive policies

1 Introduction

"…[A] man going on a journey […] called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away." (*Matthew* 25: 14–15[1]). The Bible parable describes the different ways in which the servants used the money and it also gives an evaluation of the chosen investment strategies, from the perspective of the returning master.

International comparisons[2] portray Romania as a country which needs to improve both quality and equity in higher education. At the same time, Romania is amongst the poorest countries in the European Union and invests low percentages of its national income in higher education. This naturally draws the attention to the morals of the parable of the talents: how efficiently is this money used? We are putting some old and some new analytical flesh on the equity versus quality dichotomy advanced in different reports (Vlăsceanu and Dima 2000, 9, Salmi and Hauptman 2006, 92), as we are trying to understand if Romania's "talents" are wisely spent.

[1] English Standard Version, http://www.biblegateway.com/, accessed on the 18th of August, 2013. A "talent" was a monetary unit worth about 20 years' wages for a labourer.

[2] See for example http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/romania/index_en.htm.

V. Proteasa (✉)
The Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: viorel.proteasa@gmail.com

A. Miroiu
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: admiroiu@snspa.ro; ad_miroiu@yahoo.com

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This chapter is organised as follows. In the first section we discuss the criteria on which student subsidies are distributed and some of the mechanisms which may explain the perpetuation of past institutional arrangements. In the second section we focus on the characteristics of the recipients of the subsidies. Both sections include explanations of the concepts and methodology we used. In the concluding section we argue that the current context is more favourable than that of the late nineties for a more balanced relation between quality and equity in relation to student subsidies.

2 The Distribution of Student Subsidies: Past and Present Perspectives

A turning point for Romanian higher education was the change of political and economic regime in 1989–1990. In the early nineties,[3] the Romanian universities[4] acted in an institutional setting quite similar to that of the previous period. They continued being financed by the state and they were providing schooling free of charge on a much lower scale than demanded. As Miroiu and Vlăsceanu (2012) note, "[f]ive to fifteen candidates for one place represented the normal state in the case of medicine, law, humanities, business or economics programs", while higher education attainment level in the overall population continued to be amongst the lowest in Europe. Private higher education developed in parallel. Although they had no access to public funds, private universities proliferated: given the huge demand for higher education, much above the capacities of public universities, they started to enrol students who were willing to pay tuition fees themselves. The situation changed in 1998, when public universities started to enrol tuition paying students on top of the subsidised ones, hence extending their schooling capacities beyond the limit imposed by the public budget.

The same history, told in official statistics (INS 2013), can be summarised as follows: university enrolments[5] started expanding in the early nineties, reached their historical maximum in 2007, and decreased substantially afterwards. Enrolments dropped in 2011/2012 to 60 % of the 2007/2008 peak, with private universities[6] suffering most: their enrolments dropped by 65 % between 2008 and 2012 (CNFIS 2013, 18). The evolution of participation rates within the cohort aged 19–24 follows a similar pattern.

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[3] This short overview is grounded in the historical account provided in Miroiu and Vlăsceanu (2012).

[4] We will use "universities" in this article, as non-university tertiary education in Romania since 1990 influences only marginally the dynamics of higher education.

[5] According to CNFIS (2013, 8), a statistical overview of physical students in Romania was never compiled; the available data count separate enrolments even when the same student takes more than one study programme.

[6] The drop in enrolments was significantly determined by the evolution of "Spiru Haret" University. This university had negative press coverage on issuing of diplomas for its unaccredited

In the nineties, the expansion of higher education was accompanied by an extension of the benefits to which students were entitled (Vlăsceanu and Dima 2000, 8–9). However, the overall public spending for higher education did not parallel the evolution of enrolments: Romanian universities have been "chronically under-financed" throughout this period. Between 2003 and 2011, the total funds allocated to cover the educational expenses of the subsidised students, the so-called "core funding", grew in real terms by only 5 %. Subsidies in public higher education take many forms: study grants[7] or the so called "budgeted positions" within public universities, scholarships, accommodation facilities in student dormitories, student cafeterias, public transportation discounts, medical assistance, touristic packages, and discounts at public cultural institutions[8] (e.g., museums). Some of the subsidies arrive in students' pockets, as cash (e.g., scholarships). Others take the form of direct payments for facilities students would have had to pay in the absence of the subsidy (e.g., part of the food costs in student cafeterias).

We can distinguish universal subsidies, i.e. subsidies to which all students are entitled, without additional criteria (e.g., free medical assistance), from specific subsidies that are distributed to a proportion of the students, based on some specific criteria (e.g., scholarships). These distribution criteria are extremely interesting for our discussion, as their configuration can denote the policy preference for equity or quality.

The distinction between these types of subsidies is not very sharp. For example, when demand exceeds provision, the appropriation of subsidies which are meant to be universal may be restricted, and distributive criteria are instituted. In-town public transportation discounts[9] are in most cases available on a universal basis, but there are also cases when demand exceeded the funds allotted and the universities opted for some criteria of distribution.[10]

We restrict our discussion to study grants, scholarships and accommodation facilities in student dormitories. Cumulated, these forms of student support represent the bulk of the public funds for higher education. Their origins can be traced to the pre-war period (Berlescu 1960, Berciu-Drăghicescu şi Bozgan 2004, Rados 2010). These three types of subsidy are distributed based on criteria formalised in official regulations. The empirical part of this section is grounded on our own desk-

(Footnote 6 continued)
study programmes. During the same period, "Spiru Haret" University, although belatedly, imposed quality assurance measures.

[7] The 2011 Education Law established that universities' teaching costs are to be financed through multiannual study grants. Currently this instrument is used only for the doctoral cycle. We use "study grants" to refer to the tuition the so-called "budgeted" students would pay in the absence of the subsidy.

[8] Students enrolled in private accredited institutions receive some subsidies, which include public transport discounts, medical assistance, touristic packages, and discounts at public culture institutions.

[9] The central government pays for 50 % discounts; when the local authorities contribute as well, the discount can reach 100 %. This is the case in Bucharest or Timisoara. There are also other arrangements, where students pay a certain per cent of the costs.

[10] See for example Adevărul (2010) and Ziua de Cluj (2013).

research of official regulations and it is complemented by descriptions provided by Salmi et al. (2014).

2.1 Equity and Quality: Conceptual Clarifications

Equity and quality are often part of the official rhetoric. They look like intuitive concepts, but their understanding is far from being generally acknowledged. Reading policy documents requires many times a certain dose of interpretation, as documents of this type generally do not include conceptual clarifications. The need for clarity may be more than an academic whim: as Marginson (2011) argues, different conceptual understandings of equity can generate different, sometimes conflicting evaluations of the corresponding higher education policies.

The law which currently regulates higher education in Romania includes equity and quality on the first places amongst its principles (Law Law 1/2011, Art 3, a) and b)). Equity is regarded as non-discriminatory access to education, where discrimination is used in its negative understanding. (Note that the law opens the possibility for affirmative action.) Quality is defined by reference to national and international standards and good practices. The law also refers to excellence and outstanding achievements which are to be stimulated (Law 1/2011, e.g. Art. 12, par. 3; Art. 223, par. 10).

We define a funding instrument as geared towards quality when merit-based logic is prevalent in the associated distributive pattern. While conceding that this assumption oversimplifies the causal chain, our approach is rooted in the popular wisdom according to which merit-based competition incentivises achievements, hence improves overall quality. Salmi and Hauptman (2006, 92) also argue that merit-based distribution of grants and scholarships improves quality. The Romanian law refers to this function of the scholarships (Law 1/2011, Art. 223(10)); we can also expect that such a view is shared by many Romanian policymakers.

We define a funding instrument as geared towards equity when its distributive pattern is prevalently sensitive to the individual characteristics which represent structural inequalities in Romanian higher education.[11] The Romanian education law establishes a set of priorities in terms of equity[12]: orphans, children from placement centres, Romanian ethnics from abroad, members of the Roma minority, high-school graduates from rural areas and from small towns (less than ten thousand inhabitants) (Law 1/2011, art. 205, pt. 2, 4, and 6).

[11] We consider our understanding of equity to be consistent with specific policies of the European Commission (Bevc and Uršič 2008), and of the OECD (Field et al. 2007), even though the terminology may differ.

[12] A recent inventory of the inequalities of participation in higher education can be found in Salmi et al. (2014).

2.2 Data and Methodology

Data on the distribution of the specified subsidies is retrieved mainly from two sources. Data on student population and study grants is retrieved from the National Council for Financing Higher Education (CNFIS), a buffer organisation with responsibilities in the field. The data cover the entire population, which represents enrolments in this case. For a numerical perspective on the evolution of scholarships and accommodation facilities in student dormitories we analyse sample data from the 2011 wave of the longitudinal survey conducted for the "quality barometers" of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) (Vlăsceanu et al. 2011; Păunescu et al. 2011). The respondents of the 2011 wave were bachelor or master students, or graduates of bachelor and master programme from the 2009 and 2010 waves. Other sources are indicated in the text. In terms of methodology, we used univariate analysis and we tested the estimates with the nonparametric chi-square test. We calculated the margin of error for the 0.95 confidence level using the standard formula (Agresti 2007, 9–10).

Where possible, we contrast our findings with the results of a survey conducted in 2000, on bachelor students in state and private universities (Vlăsceanu and Dima 2000, 63–65). On one hand, the samples are not exactly identical: the 2000 sample covers bachelors, while the 2011 one covers both bachelors and masters. On the other hand, the structure of the studentships was different: in 2000 the Bologna bachelor-master-doctorate cycles were not implemented; the credentials of pre-Bologna bachelor are equivalent nowadays to master degrees. The proportion of the 2000 equivalent of post-bachelor students in the relevant population should be considerably lower than that of the 2011 master students, as it can be seen in the Table 1.

Due to these reasons we consider that the two surveys have a considerable degree of overlap. We also note here that both data bases contain self-declarations.

We underline that we do not strictly compare the estimates of the 2000 and 2011 survey; we rather present the figures advanced on the basis of the 2000 survey as references for the interplay between student support policy options and inequalities in higher education, not as an accurate statistical comparison. We also use the 2000 estimates as references for some of the chi-tests.

2.3 Study Grants: Criteria

The post-1989 students fall under two categories: (1) tuition paying; and (2) state subsidised, or "budgeted" students. The state covers costs of education for only a part of the students enrolled in public universities through direct transfers to the universities, as the major component of the public funding. We will refer to the subsidised students as beneficiaries of study grants. Private universities receive no budget for education costs from the state, and therefore their students cannot

Table 1 Bachelor and master/ post bachelor enrolments 1999–2000 and 2009–2010 (data source: CNFIS)

Academic year	Bachelor and master/ 2000 correspondent of master (total)	Bachelor (%)	Master/ correspondent (%)
1999–2000	463,507	98	2
2009–2010[a] .	914,530	85	15

[a] Data for private universities for the academic years after 2010 were not published

appropriate study grants under the arrangements we discuss here. We underline that there is no intermediary category of students, whose costs of education are covered partially by the state, or from another source. An agency responsible for student loans was set up in 2009 as an alternative ways to finance higher education (Cabinet Ordinance 5/2009), but student loans were still ineffective at this writing.

The value of a study grant is calculated by a special body (the National Higher Education Funding Council—CNFIS) based on a sophisticated formula, and it varies with the field of study, the study cycle, the teaching language as well as the quality[13] of the study programme offered by an university (Miroiu and Vlăsceanu 2012, 795–800). Irrespective of the calculated value of the study grants, students are not supposed to pay additional money out of their own pockets to cover their tuition fees.[14] Therefore study grants can be seen as the only instrument for covering the costs of tuition in Romania. Study grants have a rather abstract character, given the fact that the money value of the grant does not flow through the recipient students' bank accounts.

Each study programme is allotted a certain number of study grants, the so called "budgeted positions". The norm is that "budgeted positions" for first year students are "occupied" on the basis of the entrance examinations results. Universities are free to decide their entrance requirements and procedures, but they are bound to distribute the first year study grants on the basis of the admittance results (MEN 2013). For the subsequent years, the norm is that the study grants are distributed on the basis of students' academic results in the previous year. Quotas for Roma minority and for Romanian ethnics from Moldova and the Balkans have a separate regime. Exceptionally, study grants are distributed as a form of affirmative action to socially disadvantaged students. We have identified also exceptions from the general rule of yearly re-distribution based on merit: at the Technical University in

[13] Until 2011, the financing methodologies contained the so-called "quality indicators", discussed at length in Vîiu and Miroiu (2014). The ranking of study programmes instituted by the 2011 Education Law was intended to provide indicators for the quantification of quality.

[14] In practice, universities charge administrative fees to budgeted students as well. The evidence collected by ANOSR (2010) indicates that the value and types of such "hidden taxes" presents ample fluctuations, but it generally represents a small fraction of the value of the tuition.

Cluj the students who are considered disadvantaged according to a set of social standards[15] keep their study grants if they accumulate enough ECTS credits to pass the year (UTCN 2012).

2.4 Study Grants: A Historical Perspective

According to CNFIS data, the number of study grants has almost doubled in the nineties, it reached a high plateau delimited by two maximum points in 1999/00 and 2002/03. Afterwards the data manifests a decreasing tendency, but the values remained high. The data for tuition paying students has a parabolic shape, with the maximum in 2007/08. It intersects the study grants' line in 2010/11. A CNFIS report argues that the number of study grants reflects some past equilibrium from a period when enrolments were higher; both enrolments and secondary education graduations dropped, but the number of study grants did not drop proportionally, resulting in lowering the percentage of tuition paying students (CNFIS 2013, 47) (Fig. 1).

The present situation inherits many characteristics from the last decades of the communist regime, when higher education was entirely state-provided and tuition-free, but under-dimensioned in relation to the demand. The distribution of study grants and academic admittance and progression were perfectly aligned.

As early as 1993 public universities were allowed to enrol additional students willing to pay the tuition fees. Following the enforcement of the new regulation,[16] a small debate emerged in the public sphere. Some argued that the number of state-budgeted students was extremely restrictive, and that public universities were able to offer more education for young people above the state support. However, the view that state education must be free became compelling, and soon the Cabinet decided to subsidise entirely all students. It was only in 1998 when public universities started again to enrol students who paid themselves the tuition fee. During the first years of co-habitation between "budgeted" and tuition paying students, study grants were distributed based on the admittance score and they were kept until graduation, provided the student passed the year. Practically, budgeted and tuition-paying students were offered the same education, but the rules governing the funding of their education costs where different, and did not allow for transfers between the two categories. The rules governing the financing of budgeted students were inherited from a completely public, free-of-charge higher education, while

[15] Students are considered disadvantaged if they fulfill at least one of the following criteria: (1) are orphans or come from placement centers or child care; (2) come from single parent families and their income per family member is lower than the minimum wage; and (3) come from families with more than one student at all levels of education and their income per family member is lower than the minimum wage.

[16] See http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htp_act_text?idt=13686.

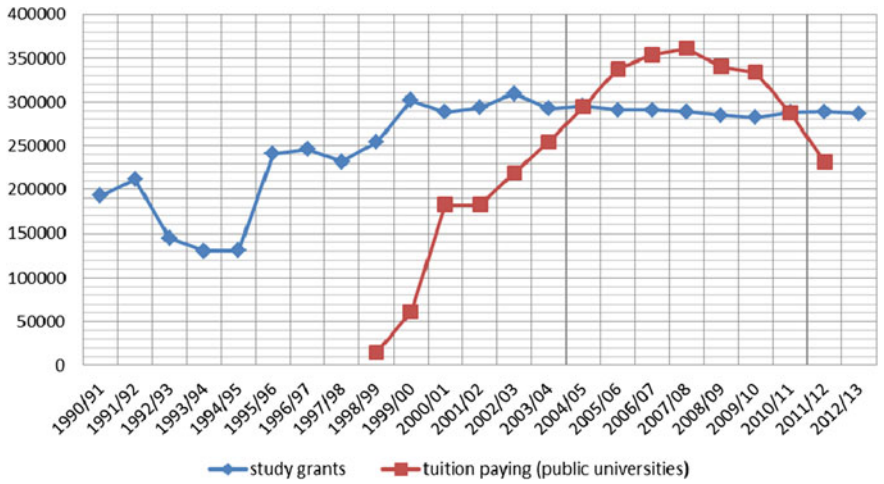

Fig. 1 Study grants and tuition paying students in public universities (1990–2012). Data sources: CNFIS and the ministry responsible for higher education

tuition-paying students were following rules resembling the arrangements in private universities.[17]

The rule of reshuffling study grants after the end of each academic year represented a notable (and the single!) departure from the initial stage of institutional amalgamation. Yet it preserved the sharp distinction between students who receive full support and students who get no support to cover tuition fees. Moreover, it preserved merit as the staple criterion of evaluation, and in theory it should have provided a strong incentive to reward the better students. An attempt to change the status quo was associated with the implementation of the new law on education passed through the Parliament in 2011. The main proponent of the change was Cătălin Baba, minister of education in the M.R. Ungureanu cabinet. He proposed to allow universities to decide on the number and the value of study grants, as well as on the criteria according to which they were to be distributed to students, within the budget allocated. (Clearly, this approach leaves room for criteria other than merit.) One of his most important proposals was to allow universities to offer students full or only partial study grants.[18] As a result, the state support a student could have received would have covered only a part of the tuition fee. However, with the fall of the Ungureanu Cabinet in May 2012, the proposed changes were abandoned.

[17] We have identified few public universities in which tuition-paying students are still not eligible for scholarships or where subsidised students are still given priority in the distribution of other subsidies (places in student dormitories or in-town transportation discounts).

[18] See for example http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/soc-in-facultati-studii-cu-bani-de-acasa-975224.html?utm_source=export&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=b13. The idea of introducing partial study grants was first presented in Miroiu (2005).

The sources of financing higher education expenses in the arrangements we have described above are public, i.e., subsidies, or private, i.e., contributions from students and their families. In the context of this dichotomy both policy-makers and researchers[19] have advanced the alternative of student loans. In fact, student loans have been instituted on paper in early 1998–1999 (Cabinet Ordinance 105/1998, Law 193/1999). We underline that one of the mandatory requirements to receive a student loan was that the applicant's income per family member should be lower than the minimum wage in the economy. Another criterion was that the applicant should have passed all exams from previous years. The student loan was instituted with reference to both equity and quality thresholds. The legislation was, however, ineffective (Explanatory Memorandum 2009) and another attempt to alter the status-quo was made in 2007, when the Romanian authorities requested the assistance of the World Bank in setting up an operational student loans system. Following the recommendations of the international experts, a designated agency was set up in 2009 (Cabinet Ordinance 5/2009), but this step proved to be insufficient as well. Shortly after its set up, the agency was given additional responsibilities to manage some very specific scholarships, which reach very few students (Cabinet Decision 1402/2009), while student loans are still ineffective as of this writing.[20]

To conclude, the merit-based distribution of study grants and their alignment with the entrance examination represented a central policy option; while needs-sensitive alternatives have been considered, they would have departed considerably from the status quo and were not adopted. Another alternative that promised to alter significantly the existing situation was the setting up of a student loan system. Although the legislative framework for student loans was firstly established in 1998–1999 and was followed by other attempts of institutionalisation, the system is still ineffective. For nearly a quarter of a century, the Romanian higher education has been experiencing only incremental changes in the financing of higher education expenses, mostly limited to minor adjustments in the distribution of study grants.

2.5 Scholarships

The legislative framework which institutes scholarships in Romanian universities is heavily prescriptive, detailed and not coherent in some of its aspects.[21] The most common and long-lived types of scholarships are merit-based scholarships and the so called "social scholarships", which are needs-based. Both types (partially) cover

[19] See Voicu (2007), Vlăsceanu and Dima (2000).

[20] See http://www.roburse.ro/agentia.php, accessed in September, 19th, 2013.

[21] The legislative acts which regulate these types of scholarships are The Education Law (1/2011) and the Cabinet Decision 558/1998. An example of incoherence is the different definitions they provide to needs, in the context of equity approaches.

the students' living expenses. The legislative frame establishes the categories of students eligible for social scholarships, as well as some general guidelines for the categories of merit-based scholarships. Merit is understood as academic achievement and outstanding performance in the field of study. A more detailed description of the categories of scholarships can be found in Salmi et al. (2014). Universities are allowed to decide on how many scholarships to distribute within each type, and on the value of each type of scholarship. The government allots a single budget line for all types of scholarships and the universities have the freedom to supplement it. The distribution methodologies are also up to the universities. Universities can decide to award other types of scholarships from their own funds.[22]

A report conducted by CNFIS (2011) found that in 2011 all the surveyed universities allotted to needs-based scholarship the smallest value among all types of scholarships. The average needs-based scholarship amounted to 184 lei, which represented only 32 % of the estimated monthly expenses on meals and accommodation. On average, the highest value a student could cumulate from needs and merit-based scholarships amounted to 87 % of the estimated costs for accommodation and meals.

We calculated the proportions associated with each type of scholarship in the 2011 data base. The estimates and the corresponding margins of error for a 0.95 confidence level can be found in the Table 2. We added to the table the values estimated by Vlăsceanu and Dima, for the academic year 1999–2000 (2000, 24).

Two observations are immediate: (1) the proportion of students who receive a form of merit-based scholarship is substantially higher than that of the beneficiaries of needs-based scholarships, and (2) in 2011 scholarships were distributed on a more extended scale than in 2000, both in terms of numbers and of the proportions of the students who appropriated them.

If students from private universities are excluded from the analysis, we obtain[23] the following proportions and the corresponding margins of error for the 0.95 confidence level: 32.0 ± 2.1 % of the students received a form of scholarship. 27.1 ± 2.0 % of the students received a form of merit-based scholarship, while a mere 4.9 ± 1.0 % of them received needs based scholarships.

A brief review of the history of post-1989 higher education in Romania reveals that the scholarships' orientation towards quality has resisted reform attempts. In 1996 the Romanian Government received a loan from the World Bank under a project[24] aimed to support the overall goals of the Government's program for reforming higher education. One of the main objectives was to improve access to higher education for talented but needy students, while mitigating the adverse

[22] For example, a partnership of three universities ("Al. I. Cuza" University in Iași , Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj and West University in TimiȘoara) grant scholarships for female master students. See http://www.rsf.uaic.ro/index.php/component/content/article/47, accessed on August 4, 2013.

[23] The null hypothesis was rejected (the proportions for public universities do not differ from the proportions corresponding to both public and private universities), $p < 0.001$, valid cases: 1471.

[24] The project was entitled *The Reform of Higher Education and Research Project.*

Table 2 Scholarships, academic years 1999–2000 and 2010–2011

Academic year	Students receiving a form of scholarship (%)	Estimated number of scholarships	Merit based scholarships (%)	Needs-based scholarships (%)
1999–2000	20 ± 2.0	92 701 ± 9270	18 ± 1.9	2 ± 0.7
2010–2011	27.6 ± 2.0	246 923 ± 18 291[a]	23.5 ± 1.9	4.1 ± 0.9

The null hypothesis was rejected (reference: Vlăsceanu and Dima (2000, 24)), $p < 0.001$, valid cases: 1778

[a] Again we lacked data corresponding to academic year 2010–2011; we used data corresponding to 2009–2010 instead

consequences of relying on cost recovery schemes. It was recommended to shift the allocation of student support from an approach based to a major extent on merit to a combination of need- and merit-based allocation. The target was to allocate no less than 20 % of the scholarships to needy but talented students, while limiting the threshold for merit-exclusive scholarships to only 3 % of overall student support budget (World Bank 1996, 94).

However, these recommendations have never been implemented.[25] A Cabinet Decision which included the move to a need- and merit-based approach in allocating the scholarships was presented to the Isărescu Cabinet in November 2000, but was not approved. Meanwhile, student associations (consisting mainly of students in public universities) fiercely opposed the change (World Bank 2003, 6).

The different points discussed above converge to the conclusion that scholarships have been distributed preponderantly on merit since the early nineties. A central policy alternative that departed considerably from the status quo was opposed on several fronts, especially by some of the student representatives. However, the context in which the revision had been considered was significantly different compared to the current context: needs-based approaches were quite frequently labelled an expression of communist mentality,[26] while the student organisations which opposed change were operating in some of the public universities, where tuition fees were not implemented at that moment.

[25] As noted by the World Bank (2003, 16) in 2003 the scholarship scheme was only slightly revised. The adjustment consisted in extending the allocation for needs-based scholarships to 30 % of the total funds for scholarships.

[26] In fact, the actions undertaken in Romanian universities during the communist period represented an extreme form of affirmative action, often marked by illiberal approaches. In the late forties and the early fifties measures were taken to increase participation rates for students from worker and peasant families: entrance quotas, limited access to non-vocational faculties for the ones with so-called "unhealthy social origin", differentiated routes to graduation, etc. (Bozgan 2004, Vese 2012).

2.6 Accommodation

Universities' regulations regarding the distribution of accommodation facilities contain references to both merit and needs. Moreover, some universities chose to prioritise different categories of students in the distribution of accommodation facilities, which include: married students (The Baptist Institute in Bucharest), children of employees in the public education system ("Ştefan cel Mare" University in Suceava), student representatives ("Babeş-Bolyai" University in Cluj, Craiova University), international students ("Transilvania" University in Braşov), students with achievements in sports (The University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine in Cluj), etc.

Vlăsceanu and Dima (2000, 27) estimated that 28 ± 2.8 % of the students were living in dormitories in 2000. They identified a decreasing tendency in regards to the percentage of students who benefit from such accommodation facilities, from 50 % in 1994.[27] Our estimate[28] based on survey data for 2011 suggests that 37 ± 2.2 % of the students in both public and private universities receive such benefits.

An additional detail is necessary to complete the perspective: we estimate that 42 ± 2.3 % of the total population of the 2011 students lived either with their parents, or in their own apartments. If we equalise the maximal unsatisfied demand with the percentage of students who rent or have other living arrangements, then 64 ± 2.2 % of the overall demand was satisfied in 2011; for public universities the demand was satisfied in a proportion of 68 ± 2.1 %.

If the current tendency of decreasing enrolments continues, we can expect the demand to be satisfied in even higher proportions. This situation can be explained as a consequence of the past decade investments in infrastructure, which were dimensioned to enrolments in the maximal range.

2.7 The Appropriation of Student Subsidies: A Statistical Perspective

The literature we reviewed provides snapshots of inequalities of participation in higher education at different moments starting from the early nineties until recently (EACEA et al. 2012, 78, Vlăsceanu et al. 2011, 133, 277–278, Voicu 2007, 23, Vlăsceanu and Dima 2000, Pasti 1998, 43–44, 145–148). The conclusions of these various studies indicate that family background—i.e., parents' education, parents' residence in rural or urban localities, and income per family member—had a

[27] This tendency may result from the increase in the number of students in public universities in the period. Due to lack of resources, the number of places in dormitories roughly remained constant in the nineties.

[28] The null hypothesis was rejected (Vlăsceanu and Dima (2000, 24)), $p < 0.001$, valid cases: 1791.

substantial and pervasive impact on participation in Romanian higher education. The policy reports we have consulted provide converging images e.g. (MECTS (2012, 12), Jongbloed et al. (2010, 510)).

Research on recent years' cohorts points to the fact that some of the past discrepancies in terms of participation rates tended to decrease as enrolments expanded. Voicu and Vasile (2010) argue that rural-urban attainment inequalities decreased considerably between 2000 and 2006.[29] The tendency they identify interrupts a previously stable trend of increasing inequalities which started in the early seventies and culminated in the nineties. Vlăsceanu et al. (2011) found that 67 % of the 2010 students come from families whose level of education is lower than higher education and interpreted their estimates as indication of ascendant social mobility.

We have also reviewed the literature on the contribution of student subisidies to the reproduction of the social structure within higher education. Pasti (1998) argued that study grants' distribution contributed to the escalation of the social inequalities in higher education. He concluded that the financing of higher education represented a state policy which redistributed income from the poorer parts of the population to the wealthiest 20 % (Pasti 1998, 43–44). Vlăsceanu and Dima (2000, 24–25) found that scholarships were generally serving to top up the income of the better off students, serving rather as "extra pocket money". They also found that the composition of the student body resembled the social structure of the wealthiest two deciles of the Romanians (Vlăsceanu and Dima 2000, 25). Their findings indicate that the distribution of study grants increased inequalities in higher education.

In this second part of the article we assess the proportions in which the categories of students defined by the three "equity" variables appropriate student subsidies. We explore which categories of students are "over- and under-represented" as beneficiaries of student subsidies. In this respect we take as reference the estimates of the proportions in which the categories defined by the three variables are represented in the overall student cohort. Our aim is to understand the contribution of the current arrangements regarding student subsidies to the dynamics of the inequalities in Romanian higher education.

2.8 Data

The analysis is carried out on the survey data we used to discuss the numerical evolution of scholarships and accommodation facilities in the previous part of the article.

[29] The authors warn that the methodology they use may overestimate attainment rates for student with a rural background for the period between 2000 and 2006.

2.9 Variables

We constructed the independent variables as indicators of students' socio-economic background: residence (rural-urban), parents' education and income.

Parents' education is seen as being determinant for the social class and family income (Voicu and Vasile 2010, 17) and it is used as predictor for the reproduction of the social structure (Vlăsceanu et al. 2011, Vlăsceanu and Dima 2000, Voicu and Rusu 2011, 143–147). We defined parents' education as a dichotomous variable. We labelled "higher education" the cases where at least one of the parents has graduated a bachelor programme or higher. The rest of the cases are labelled "lower". We discarded the cases in which there was no valid answer for any of the parents, or where one parent's level of education was below higher education and there was no valid answer for the other. The latter cases could belong to both of the defined categories.

Rural-urban inequalities are seen as pervasive in Romanian higher education, due to a complex set of factors which include the low quality and inaccessibility of secondary education in rural areas, the physical distance from universities, and due to other factors related to the context of the family (Voicu and Vasile 2010, 11). We defined rural-urban background as a dichotomous variable, where "rural" stands for the cases in which parents live in rural areas and "urban" represents the rest of the cases. Alternative definitions are used in the literature e.g. the previously quoted authors distinguish rural from urban students on grounds of their place of birth. Our definition is similar to that of the 2011 national census[30] and our option is grounded on issues of data comparability. We removed orphans and students whose parents live in another country.

Family income is relevant not only from the perspective of the social background, but also because the strength of material incentives is in theory affected by the available financial resources. The only variable in the 2011 data base which referred to income was the monthly personal income. We removed the cases which corresponded to graduates which were questioned in the 2009 and 2011 waves, as their monthly income at the time of answering the questionnaire, mostly from salaries, are irrelevant for the distribution of students according to income. We also removed three cases, whose declarations were implausible.[31] We note that the declared personal income is not necessarily equal to the income per capita, which is the variable used in official statistics and in the 2000 survey. Therefore, the proportions we estimate cannot be compared with Vlăsceanu and Dima's (2000) estimates, nor with the income distribution in Romania's population.

We constructed the dependent variables as dichotomous variables which describe if the respondent benefits from student subsidies or not. We analyse the

[30] http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/ , Accessed on the 25th of September, 2013.

[31] One respondent declared an income of 1 RON, while two declared they were receiving a form of scholarship, but their personal declared income was lower than the minimum scholarship calculated by CNFIS (2011).

distribution of the subsidies described in the first part of the article: study grants, scholarships and accommodation. We are interested only in those students who are eligible to receive the subsidies, therefore we removed from the sample the responses corresponding to students from private universities. We analysed only the appropriation of merit-based scholarship, as the "social scholarships" is supposed to be appropriated exclusively by needy students. We kept in the sample the recipients of needs-based scholarships, as their removal would have modified the proportions within the reference population.

2.10 Methodology and Results

We opted for using bivariate analysis, plus the chi-square test and the calculation of margins of error for the 0.95 confidence level. In the construction of the null hypotheses we opted for two different approaches: one for the dichotmous variables (parents' education and parents' residence) and one for the declared personal income (numerical variable).

For the dichotomous variables, we firstly estimated the distributions within public universities. According to our calculations, 17.6 ± 1.7 % of the students in public universities are coming from rural areas. For reference, the proportion of the 19–25 population who is recorded as living in rural localities reaches 42.7 %, according to according to official data (INS 2013). We estimate that 62.8 ± 2.2 % of the students are from parents without higher education, while 88 % of the adult population did not graduate higher education, according to Voicu and Rusu (2011, 144). We used the references for the overall population as null hypotheses for chi-square tests; the calculations are presented in the Table 3. Our estimates indicate that the least well off categories are under-represented amongst students of public universities,[32] in relation to both parents' residence and parents' higher education attainment. The results are highly significant.

In the second stage we estimated the proportions in which each category defined by the two "equity" variables appropriates the subsidies. We tested the estimates using chi-square tests, where the null hypothesis is that each category defined by the two variables appropriates subsidies in proportions equal to their share in the student cohort within public universities. The results are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

We opted for a different sequence of operations for the income variable. We transformed the numerical variable in a categorical one, by splitting the data into quintiles.[33] The percentages associated with each quintile and values' range are

[32] We note that the inclusion of students from private universities in the sample does not change significantly the situation: the estimate for the proportion of students from parents living in urban areas is 16.2 ± 1.7%, while the figure for the proportion of students from parents who did not attain higher education is 62.9 ± 2.2%.

[33] We use "quintile" to refer to the sets of data delimited by the values of the quintiles.

Table 3 References for parents' residence and parents' education: proportions within students from public universities

Parents' residence	Rural (%)	Urban (%)	Valid cases	Null hypothesis	Significance
Proportion	17.6 ± 1.8	82.4 ± 1.8	1,426	Rejected (42.7%)	$p < 0.001$
Parents' education	Lower (%)	Higher ed. (%)	Valid cases		
Proportion	62.8 ± 2.2	37.2 ± 2.2	1,338	Rejected (76%)[a]	$p < 0.001$

[a] We constructed the reference maximising the higher education attainment rate per family, namely by approximating the higher education attainment rate per family with the double of the individual rate, in the overall population. In practical terms, our approximation implies that each adult with higher education is married to someone with lower level of education, which is highly unlikely

Table 4 Appropriation of subsidies according to parents' residence (public universities)

Proportions in which subsidies are appropriated	Parents' education (%)		Chi square test results (Degree of freedom = 1)	Standardised residual	
	Lower	Higher ed.		Lower	Higher ed.
Study grants	61.2 ± 2.2	38.8 ± 2.2	$\chi2(N = 1,047) = 3.545$, $p = 0.060$, null hypothesis validated	−0.6	0.7
Scholarships (merit)	59.5 ± 2.3	40.5 ± 2.3	$\chi2(N = 380) = 2.175$, $p = 0.140$, null hypothesis validated	−0.8	1.0
Student dormitories	67.9 ± 2.1	32.1 ± 2.1	$\chi2(N = 595) = 11.836$, $p = 0.001$, null hypothesis rejected	1.6	−2.1

Table 5 Appropriation of subsidies according to parents' education (public universities)

Proportions in which subsidies are appropriated	Parents' residence		Chi square test results (Degree of freedom = 1)	Standardised residual	
	Rural (%)	Urban (%)		Rural	Urban
Study grants	18.7 ± 1.7	81.3 ± 1.7	$\chi2(N = 1,049) = 1.454$, $p = 0.228$, null hypothesis validated	0.5	−0.2
Scholarships (merit)	20.0 ± 1.8	80.0 ± 1.8	$\chi2(N = 370) = 1.752$, $p = 0.186$, null hypothesis validated	1.0	−0.5
Student dormitories	23.2 ± 2.0	76.8 ± 2.0	$\chi2(N = 590) = 22.366$, $p < 0.001$, null hypothesis rejected	3.3	−1.5

Table 6 Income quintiles

Quintile	Income range (RON)	Percentage in the sample	Rural (%)	Urban (%)	Lower (%)	Higher education (%)
i	10–350	18.1	82.6	17.4	70.1	29.9
ii	400–555	21.4	83.4	16.6	63.1	36.9
iii	600–999	15.6	77.0	23.0	64.5	35.5
iv	1,000–1,150	22.9	84.3	15.7	56.2	43.8
v	1,200–10,000	22.1	84.9	15.1	63.5	36.5
Valid cases		1,001	936		953	

Table 7 Appropriation of subsidies according to income (public universities)

Quintile	Student cohort (reference)	Study grants		Scholarships		Student dormitories	
		Yes (%)	Std. residuals	Yes (%)	Std. residuals	Yes (%)	Std. residuals
i	18.1 ± 1.8	19.5 ± 1.8	0.0	24.4 ± 2.0	1.9	18.4 ± 1.8	−0.4
ii– iv	61.9 ± 2.2	63.3 ± 2.2	0.5	60.7 ± 2.2	−0.3	66.4 ± 2.2	1.2
v	22.1 ± 1.9	17.2 ± 1.7	−0.9	14.8 ± 1.6	−1.4	15.2 ± 1.6	−1.7
Chi square test (df = 2)		$\chi2 = 5.172$, p = 0.075, N = 853		$\chi2 = 8.059$, p = 0.018, N = 858		$\chi2 = 9.219$, p = 0.010, N = 858	
Null hypothesis		Validated		Rejected		Rejected	

presented in the table below. For informative purpose we also included in the Table 6 the distribution according to parents' residence and parents' education.

We note that most probably the data does not reflect in-kind income. The questionnaire did not include qualitative questions on how costs associated with being a student are covered. However, it is a common strategy that students receive other forms of in-kind support from their families, such as food, clothing or payment of telephone bills, which are not reflected in the current data. Therefore, probably the values corresponding to at least the lowest quintile would grow if these forms of in-kind support are included.

Following the transformation of the variable, we estimated the proportions in which students from lowest and highest quintiles appropriate subsidies. We tested the results with chi-square test; the null hypothesis was that the appropriation of student subsidies is not sensitive to income. The references are in the third column (percentages within the sample). The results are presented in the Table 7.

2.11 Summary of Empirical Findings

The null hypotheses consisted in affirming that the proportions in which subsidies are appropriated by each category of students defined by the "equity" variables equals the correspondent level of representation in the cohort within public

Table 8 Appropriation of merit-based scholarships by income categories: odds ratio

Quintiles	Lowest: highest	Middle: highest
Odds ratio	1.94	1.33

universities. For study grants the null hypothesis was confirmed in relation to all independent variables. For scholarships, the null hypothesis was validated in relation to parents' residence and parents' education. The null hypothesis was rejected for the appropriation of scholarships according to income categories. These findings indicate there is no evidence that the current distribution pattern of study grants and scholarships creates advantages for the categories defined by the three variables associated with family background, with a notable exception: the appropriation of merit-based scholarships is sensitive to income. We stress again that the income variable in our sample refers to the monthly income the students declare and it is not comparable with the distribution of income in the overall population. We find important to remind that, overall, the better off categories of population are over-represented among the students, which implies that a distribution pattern which is not sensitive to the family background according to the construction of our analysis contributes to the maintenance of the existing social structure within the student cohort in public universities i.e. the under-representation of the least well off categories.

The standardised residuals indicate a slight over-representation of students from the lowest quintile amongst those who benefit from merit-based scholarships and a slight under-representation of those from the highest quintile. The low values of the residuals (<2) requires caution in interpreting the finding as an indication of association (Agresti 2007, 38–39). We calculated odds ratio between lowest and middle quintile, and the highest quintile. The results are presented in the Table 8:

The odds that a student from the lowest quintile appropriates merit-based scholarships in public universities are 1.94 higher than those for a student from the highest quintile. The odds ratio between middle income and highest income students (1.33) are lower that the odds ratio between the lowest and the highest income students (1.94). If talents are evenly distributed across the population and the wealthier ones stand more chances to benefit of an environment which stimulates learning, then this finding indicates that wealthier students could find scholarship less attractive than their less well off counterparts. This association is consonant with the idea that the strength of the incentive depends on how the recipient perceives the value of the subsidy, which raises concern regarding the efficiency of merit-based scholarships in terms of motivating achievements. In fact, we estimate[34] that 55.9 ± 2.3 % of the students in public universities which are located in the highest quintile declare they derive their most important share of income from employment or self-employment, while the reference for the share of the sample corresponding to public universities is 23.3 ± 1.9 %; for other 38.5 ± 2.2 % of the

[34] The estimates are highly significant: $\chi 2 = 203.550$, $p < 0.001$, N = 855, df = 6.

Table 9 Appropriation of study grants according to income categories: odds ratios

Quintiles	Lowest: highest	Middle: highest
Odds ratio	2.52	2.32

students in the highest quintile we estimate that the main source of income are the parents and relatives. We estimate that students from the lowest quintile rely mainly on income from parents and relatives (59.8 ± 2.3 % of them) and on scholarships: 32.3 ± 2.1 %, while the reference for the corresponding share of the sample is estimated to 11.3 ± 1.4 %. Unfortunately, we cannot distinguish students whose household belong to the lowest income category from students who enjoy only limited financial autonomy from their parents and relatives. This is due to the construction of the questionnaire and it constitutes a limit of our analysis.

We used odds ratios to test the negative association between placement in income categories and appropriation of study grants. As failure in obtaining a study grant would result in paying tuition in a public or private university, we included in the analysis students from both types of universities. We note that the proportions in which students from lowest, middle and highest income quintiles appropriate study grants differs significantly from their level of representation in the overall student population, public and private universities included ($\chi 2(2) = 30.114$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 987$, null hypothesis rejected). We calculated odds ratio between lowest and middle quintiles, and the highest one. The results are presented in the Table 9:

The odds ratio table indicates that students from the highest income quintile are considerably less likely to appropriate study grants than their less well off cohort fellows. On the other hand, they are considerably more likely to pay tuition fees. The odds ratio between lowest and highest income categories (2.52) can indicate low attractiveness of the study grants for the wealthiest students or the fact that tuition fees represent a significant obstacle for the students who declare the lowest income, or both. The odds ratio between middle and highest income quintiles (2.32) is in line with the former explanation. The comparison of the odds ratio provide additional evidence to accredit the thesis that incentives associated with the merit based distribution of study grants are weaker for wealthier students.

The null hypotheses are rejected for accommodation in student dormitories, in relation to all three "equity" variables, within the share of the sample which corresponds to public universities. The values of the standardised residuals exceed 2 in relation to parents' residence and parents' education, which indicates a significant discrepancy in the appropriation pattern. We calculated odds ratio between the least well off and the better off categories defined by the variables. The results are presented in the Table 10:

The relatively low value of the odds ratio corresponding to the lowest quintile can be explained by the fact that an important share of the students in this category live with their parents or with relatives (44.0 ± 2.3 %), according to our estimates. For reference, the estimated proportion of students in public universities living with their parents or with relatives in the corresponding share of the sample amounts

Table 10 Appropriation of accommodation facilities in student dormitories: odds ratio

	Rural/Urban	Lower/Higher education	Lowest/Highest quintiles	Middle/Highest quintiles
Odds ratio	1.94	1.48	1.34	1.71

30.3 ± 2.1 %.[35] If we calculate the odds that a student lives in more comfortable facilities i.e. owning an apartment, or renting an apartment by oneself or with others, then the association is re-established. Students from the highest quintile stand 5.90 times more chances to live in more comfortable facilities than their counterparts from the other end of the income spectrum (quintile i), and 2.37 times more chances than middle income students (quintiles ii-iv). Overall, student dormitories stand more chances to be inhabited by students from the least well off categories within public universities, when they do not live with their parents or with their relatives.

3 Conclusions

Student subsidies are recognised to serve two functions: to incentivise achievement and to provide social support. We labelled subsidies as geared towards quality when merit-based logic is prevalent in the associated distributive pattern; following a similar logic, a distributive pattern which is prevalently sensitive to students' background was categorised as indicating an orientation towards equity.

We found that merit is the staple criterion based on which subsidies were distributed in the entire post-1989 period and were still distributed as of this writing. For study grants, distribution based on academic results constitutes the norm. Merit and needs are associated with different types of scholarships; the value and the proportion of the total budget allocated for each type of scholarship denote a net orientation towards quality. In the past two decades the attempts to change the status quo failed and the accepted incremental adjustments did not change the overall orientation. In the case of study grants, salient features of past arrangements indicate that the distribution pattern exhibits a considerable dose of path-dependence. The proposed revision to allow for the distribution of partial study grants was neutral to quality and equity, while allowing for more room of maneuver at the university level; yet it did not pass. The student loan alternative which imposed in its first version both quality and equity thresholds did not become effective. In the case of scholarships, the proposed revision was explicitly oriented towards ballancing quality and equity, and this was one of the main reasons it was discarded.

[35] The estimates are highly significant: $\chi 2 = 47.507$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 858$, $df = 8$.

Over the past twenty years the pool of subsidies available to students has generally grown. However, the ratio between those who appropriated the subsidies and those who didn't, though they were eligible, fluctuated. The current provision of study grants and accommodation facilities reflects capacities from a past period of high enrolments, when efforts were made to increase capacities to cater for the unsatisfied demand. The issue of efficiency in resource utilisation becomes stringent in this context, especially if pressures on the public budget are to continue.

Are Romania's *talents* wisely spent? The current arrangements present major shortcomings in relation to equity in the first place. The results of our analysis indicate that the distribution of study grants, scholarships and accommodation facilities in student dormitories is generally neutral to students' family background, which implies a marginal contribution to the overcoming of the analyzed inequalities. The current situation represents an improvement as compared to the early 2000s, when subsidies supported the reproduction of the social structure within the universities, according to the conclusions of Vlăsceanu and Dima (2000), and Pasti (1998). This evolution was not the consequence of an intentional change of orientation - it is rather associated with the expansion of higher education and probably with the fact that many better off families choose to send their childrens for studies abroad.[36]

The evolutions discussed above are also important for the configuration of potential opponents to equity-oriented reforms within the student body. In the late nineties, the distribution of subsidies was concentrated towards a socio-economic elite, which, in theory, stood more chances to mobilise opposition than a heterogeneous and more numerous group, such as that of the beneficiaries of subsidies in 2011. An indication that a move towards equity may be accepted on the side of the students is represented by the fact that an important national federation of student organisations recently became supportive towards equity policies (ANOSR 2013).

> Overall, we consider that the current context is more favourable to a shift of orientation towards a more balanced relation between equity and quality in the public policies regarding student subsidies than that of the late nineties. In terms of efficiency, a combination of merit and needs criteria could prove more rewarding from both the equity and quality perspectives, as current arrangements present major shortcomings in both respects.

[36] The magnitude of this tendency cannot be properly assessed. The figures advanced - 22 000, 35 000 and 50 000 for 2010, are estimates by various NGO's. See http://www.zf.ro/eveniment/cati-studenti-romani-invata-in-strainatate-22-000-35-000-sau-50-000-6952029, accessed in October, 16th, 2013.

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The Quest for Quality in Higher Education: Is There Any Place Left for Equity and Access?

Gabriel-Alexandru Vîiu and Adrian Miroiu

Keywords Quality assessment · Accreditation · Funding policy · Principal-agent theory · Equity and access

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades Romanian higher education has been the subject of numerous policy reforms aiming to increase the overall quality[1] and performance of higher education institutions (HEIs): two comprehensive laws on education and several second-order legislative acts intended to transform the sphere of higher education into a modern system of teaching and research. Funding was one of the most important mechanisms used to stimulate universities in the direction of improved performance. Throughout the article elements of student equity and access which operate within the framework of quality assessment are highlighted and the impact of this framework on the funding process is evaluated. The article mainly focuses on public HEIs because, unlike private institutions which do not rely on state funding, public universities are particularly sensitive to shifts in the funding policies.

Following a brief section outlying the theoretical framework used in the paper, two distinct but related subjects are discussed. First, the early efforts undertaken by

[1] In this article we adopt a broad definition of quality: it represents "a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline" (Vlăsceanu et al. 2007).

G.-A. Vîiu (✉) · A. Miroiu
Department of Political Science, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: gabiviiu@yahoo.com

A. Miroiu
e-mail: admiroiu@snspa.ro; ad_miroiu@yahoo.com

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the government in the nineties to implement a system of accreditation for all higher education institutions and the subsequent transformation of the initial accreditation scheme into a broader process of quality assurance are analysed. Second, the efforts of policymakers to define and integrate aspects of quality in the distribution of state funds to Romanian public universities are described with reference to the recent implications of the national process of university classification and study programme ranking for issues of quality, funding and equity. This approach is meant to reflect the general process through which the study programmes in the Romanian public HEIs come to operate: first they must be accredited (a process which inter alia assures financial support from the state); second, they must meet further performance and quality requirements which determine the financial allocations they can secure for their subsequent activities. Throughout the article the evolution of accreditation, quality assurance and funding is deconstructed using the framework of principal-agent theory in order to illustrate specific problems typical in the governance of higher education.

2 Theoretical Considerations

As summarized by Moe (1984), the principal-agent model is a theoretical tool initially developed in the field of economics that postulates a contractual relationship between two parties: a principal who is interested in providing certain outcomes and an agent that the principal entrusts with the operational tasks needed to achieve these desired outcomes. The model assumes that the parties are rational. Therefore, it must take into account the fact that the agent has his own interests (which may be different from the principal's interests), and so he pursues the principal's objectives only to the extent that the incentive structure imposed in their contract renders such behaviour advantageous. The principal's chief dilemma is therefore that of defining the incentive structure in such a way that the agent is compelled to pursue the preferences of the principal, i.e. to provide the outcomes specified in the contract.

However, this problem is further compounded by a specific feature of the relationship between the principal and the agent, namely *asymmetric information* manifest in the fact that agents possess information that the principal does not have (or that could only be acquired at great and unfeasible cost). Asymmetric information brings about two important problems (Lane and Ersson 2000): *ex ante* adverse selection of agents resulting from hidden information, and *ex post* moral hazard resulting from hidden actions taken by the agent without the knowledge of the principal. In the first case, the principal may decide to enter a contract with an agent he may only later find is not suited to accomplish his desired outcomes; in the second case, even if adverse selection has been avoided, the principal may find he is confronted with an agent that does not strictly adhere to the terms of the initial contract. The main concern of the principal-agent theory is therefore that of finding

solutions to both adverse selection and moral hazard.[2] Because it tends to view the behaviour of the agent as primarily opportunistic and self-interested, the theory identifies various instruments needed to counteract the potentially opportunistic behaviour of the agent. Three such common instruments are available to the principal: monitoring or surveillance, risk-sharing contracts or retaliation (Lane 2008).

Two separate traditions in the application of principal-agent models can be discerned (Miller 2005; Lane and Kivistö 2008): on the one hand there are the canonical economic versions of principal-agent theory. On the other hand there is a distinct political science perspective which has relaxed some of the more rigid assumptions formulated by the economic version. According to it, the contract between the parties is implicit in nature, focuses on both agent and principal, considers that all actors (i.e. all principals and agents) are motivated by economic utility as well as political power, and acknowledges the existence of multiple and collective principals, as well as the possibility that intermediary agents and principals can exist between a primary principal and agent. In addition, the political science-driven principal-agent model considers that a social/political contract is the principal's primary mode of control; it also recognizes that the output of the contractual relationship is a public (rather than a private) good, and, lastly, admits that shirking (the agent's wilful neglect of his responsibilities toward the principal) need not only be a consequence of individual action, but may also result because of structural considerations, especially in cases involving multiple principals and agents where information is not properly communicated.

In its most general form, the principal-agent model can be used in political science to represent the relationship between the population of a given country (the principal) and its government (the agent that has to provide specific public goods and services). However, the model has a much wider range of application. In particular, this article explores how adverse selection, moral hazard and information asymmetry have had direct implications for the operation of Romanian HEIs over the past two decades and how they have shaped governmental policies in the field of quality assurance and funding of the higher education system.[3] Throughout this paper accreditation is considered as a specific screening device that governments employ in order to select which universities they support from the state budget, while the education funding policy makes up the reward rules that frame the interactions of government and accredited HEIs and periodic quality assessment of universities acts as a monitoring device. In such a setting the government is the principal and HEIs are agents[4] entrusted with specific outcomes (creation and

[2] Note that the principal-agent model is a particularly useful tool in discussing both the screening devices employed by principals to select an agent prior to entering a contract and the subsequent reward rules that govern the relationship between the principal and the agent (Petersen 1993).

[3] See also Kivistö (2005, 2007) for another appeal to the principal-agent theory in the investigation of educational policies.

[4] To be more precise, the government is the primary principal and HEIs are the primary agents; various intermediary principals and agents may exist between the primary ones; for example, the

dissemination of knowledge, preparation and training of skilled individuals for the labour market, etc.). Accreditation thus becomes an instrument in solving the problem of adverse selection, while differential (quality or performance-based) funding and monitoring through periodic assessment are solutions to the problem of moral hazard.

3 Approaches to Quality Assurance in the Romanian Higher Education

Consistent with the overall pattern in Central and Eastern Europe where, at least initially, the "predominant approach to assuring quality in higher education has been accreditation by a state-established agency" (Kahoutek 2009), early conceptions of quality assurance processes in the Romanian higher education system seem to have been very narrowly identified with the process of accreditation. In general, accreditation has at least two crucially important financial implications for HEIs (Schwarz and Westerheijden 2007): first, it may function as a prerequisite for funding; second, it makes institutions and programmes that have accreditation status more attractive to students and can therefore indirectly increase institutional funding in systems where the funding depends on student numbers. Both provisions apply to Romania. Therefore, a discussion of accreditation is important, both in itself as well as for student equity and access.

As Scott points out, issues of quality assessment, accreditation and evaluation became common themes in Central and Eastern European higher education following the collapse of communism, with most quality systems in the region being adapted from West European or American models (Scott 2000). Consistent with this depiction, the issue of quality in Romanian higher education began to emerge as a pressing concern during the early nineties when the country embarked on the difficult transition from a centralized socialist system to a democratic society. Like most other Central and East European countries, following the economic and political liberalization brought about by the fall of communist rule Romania witnessed a rapid expansion of private higher education suppliers[5] which eventually demanded a governmental response. The main problem in this turbulent period was that numerous corporations started declaring themselves as suppliers of higher education services in a volatile setting where "no criteria or standards existed for the coordination of private initiative in the field of higher education" (Korka 2009). From an agency perspective, the unchecked proliferation of private HEIs put early

(Footnote 4 continued)
national agencies responsible with accreditation, quality assurance and funding may be viewed as intermediary principals (if one considers their relation to individual HEIs), but also as intermediary agents (if one considers their relation to the government).

[5] There is no consensus regarding the exact number of private HEIs operating during the initial years of transition but estimates range between a few dozen to more than 250.

governments in a position where they were faced with a typical adverse selection problem in that they could not know which agents (HEIs and other new suppliers) offered quality educational services.[6] A corollary of this situation was that government had difficulties in deciding how to distribute state funds to support the newly-established higher education providers.

In order to solve the increasing problem of adverse selection, the government's initial response, enacted through the Law no 88/1993 regarding the accreditation of higher education institutions and the recognition of diplomas, sought to establish firm rules regarding what type of entities were officially sanctioned to provide higher education services. The law established a state supported National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) which was invested with the task of temporarily authorizing and then accrediting institutions and study programmes which met certain minimum standards regarding teaching staff and other input criteria.[7]

The law, however, made no explicit reference to the notion of quality; it was strictly concerned with the process of accreditation and, to a lesser extent, with a distinct process labelled "periodic academic evaluation", a process which was tantamount to (periodic) external quality assessment.[8] The law's overall positive influence was its remarkable success in combating the chaos of the early post-communist higher education landscape (Miroiu 1998), but, nonetheless, it also suffered from several shortcomings. Korka (2009) mentions three of them: the neglect of mechanisms of internal quality control; apparent quality homogeneity of study programmes[9]; the lack of any substantial difference between initial

[6] In this article we limit the application of agency theory to a top-down approach, where HEIs are the agents of government. But if we change the perspective to a bottom-up approach, the population of prospective students is the principal, and HEIs are its agents. This principal is also confronted with the same pressing problem of adverse selection. When searching for adequate agents to meet their desired outcomes, principals may appeal to accreditation: in a rapidly changing environment it is an efficient signalling device employed by universities to communicate good quality to prospective students (Batteau 2006).

[7] It is important to note that CNEAA could not grant authorization or accreditation itself but, based on its evaluations, could only make proposals; the formal power to temporarily authorize an institution remained in the hands of the government which was also in charge of elaborating proposals to Parliament for accreditation of new institutions. CNEAA's successor, ARACIS, is in a similar situation.

[8] The law therefore also incorporated an element of monitoring but it is important to note that the law openly discriminated against newly established (private) institutions, as they were the only ones obliged to go through the procedures of institutional accreditation. The (public) universities already operating before the regime change of 1989 were only subject to monitoring through the process of periodic evaluation of their study programmes which was to be conducted at five year intervals. However, all HEIs were on the same par in case a new study programme was initiated.

[9] In a logic of path-dependence this apparent homogeneity initially triggered by accreditation procedures can be seen as a first expression of a later phenomenon already well documented by Romanian scholars (Miroiu and Andreescu 2010; Vlăsceanu et al. 2010; Păunescu et al. 2011; Florian 2011), namely structural isomorphism whereby HEIs mimic each other in terms of the study programmes they offer.

accreditation and subsequent periodic evaluation.[10] All of these were further compounded by the fact that quality evaluation was virtually neglected in practice because of the more pressing tasks of authorization and accreditation (Vlăsceanu 2005). To put it in a different way, throughout the first decade of transition the government was more preoccupied with the problem of adverse selection (which it did solve with the aid of CNEAA) than with recurring issues of moral hazard.

Quality in this stage was defined strictly in terms of compliance with a set of minimum standards to be attained in order to secure entry in the market of higher education providers. As noted by other authors, Law no 88/1993 "appeared rather as a response to the market evolution than as part of higher education policy" (Nicolescu 2007). Subsumed to the narrow interpretation of accreditation, quality had no nuances and functioned solely on the dichotomous logic of approval (authorization/accreditation) and rejection: those institutions meeting the minimum requirements were accredited (and therefore considered to be of quality), while those that did not were excluded from the system.

The need to reconfigure the normative framework regarding quality assessment began to emerge as an important concern following Romania's adhesion to the Bologna Process, given the specific objective of establishing a European dimension in quality assurance. Only a month after the Bologna Declaration was signed, Law no 88/1993 was amended by Law no 144/1999 which, although offering virtually no conceptual elaboration, introduced the notion of "quality assurance" as such in the legal framework governing higher education. Following the amendments made through Law no 144/1999 quality assurance came to be an objective of CNEAA, although evaluation and accreditation remained the Council's main focus. It would take another 6 years, however, for a more substantial conception of quality assurance to be implemented by Romanian policymakers.

Following the European drive for convergence of higher education systems, alongside a number of other structural reforms[11] meant to implement the Bologna objectives, a Cabinet Emergency Ordinance issued in 2005 (and subsequently endorsed by Parliament and enacted as Law no 87/2006) was specifically devoted to the issue of quality assurance in education. The new law marked, at least in formal terms, a visible turn in the process of quality assurance: it made a firmer distinction between accreditation and quality assurance (accreditation was now explicitly defined as "a component of quality assurance"); it differentiated between internal and external quality assurance following the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*; it outlined a methodology for quality assurance and explicitly listed the domains and criteria

[10] Although mentioned in the law as separate processes, both accreditation and periodic academic evaluation relied on the same standards and criteria. Moreover, the periodic evaluation only entailed verification that the standards set for initial accreditation were still met by a particular study programme in a HEI several years after accreditation had been secured.

[11] These included, for example, the introduction of the ECTS system; the implementation of the 3-2-3 system for bachelor, master and doctoral studies; the introduction of the Diploma Supplement.

encompassed by this methodology; it instituted the obligation of HEIs to create a commission responsible with internal evaluation and quality assurance; it created the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) which was to supersede CNEEA[12] and which would operate as an autonomous institution.[13] The law also contained a provision of meta-accreditation because it required ARACIS itself to submit to a periodic process of international evaluation.

From a structural point of view, the new methodology[14] for external evaluation comprised three broad domains–institutional capacity, educational efficacy and quality management–each with distinct criteria to which standards and corresponding performance indicators were attached. A total of 43 distinct performance indicators were specified (10 for institutional capacity; 16 for educational efficacy and 17 for quality management). The methodology made a further distinction between *minimum* (obligatory) standards and *reference* (optimal) standards. In order to secure authorization or accreditation an institution had to meet the minimum level for all standards. Failure to comply with the minimum level for even a single performance indicator prohibited the possibility of authorization/accreditation.

In the context of this paper it is worth noting that the methodology of ARACIS includes indicators specifically associated with elements that could be considered as part of a broader concern with student equity and access, in that they specify general student facilities and various types of services which must be provided by HEIs. It should also be mentioned that these indicators are among the few explicit (albeit indirect) constraints imposed by law on HEIs with respect to equity and access issues: (1) the s*ystem of scholarships allocation and other forms of financial aid for students*. As a minimum standard, this indicator requires the existence and consistent application of clear regulations for awarding scholarships; as a standard of reference, however, the indicator outlines as desirable that at least 10–20 % of the institution's resources be devoted explicitly to a scholarship fund. Another relevant indicator is (2) *incentive and remediation programmes* which, as a minimum, specifies that a university should have programmes that further encourage students with high performance but, additionally, that it also have programmes to support those with difficulties in learning[15]; as a desirable standard of reference, the

[12] According to the new law ARACIS has two distinct departments: one for accreditation and one for external evaluation; the department for accreditation took over the attributions of CNEAA.

[13] CNEEA had previously been subordinated to the Romanian Parliament.

[14] See the *Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*, available at http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Proceduri/Methodology_for_External_Evaluation.pdf.

[15] The methodology does not give any explanation regarding what "students with learning difficulties" represent; they could simply be students with lower levels of performance who need extra guidance to reach the standards set by the faculty or they could be students with certain disabilities; in the latter case a certain level of affirmative action could be implied in the use of the indicator.

methodology mentions the existence of supplementary tutorial programmes. A final indicator we wish to note is (3) *student services* which, as a minimum, states that universities are required to have social, cultural and sport services; a particularly noteworthy fact is the explicit provision that the university must offer (again as a minimum) housing for at least 10 % of its students.

These indicators point towards the fact that within the context of quality assessment there are at least some elements of potential relevance to equity and access which universities must take into account. However, without comprehensive data regarding the individual universities' actual attainment of specific values for the performance indicators (especially in terms of reference standards), no systemic judgement can be made as to whether or not universities provide sufficient services and support, in sufficient quantities, for all the students that require them.

Since it began its activities, ARACIS has analysed more than three thousand study (bachelor and master) programmes and has also completed institutional external evaluation of more than ninety universities. Equally important, its annual activity reports indicate that it has also undertaken the task of periodic evaluation (both of institutions and their study programmes) which signals that unlike its predecessor, CNEAA, which was mostly concerned with the problem of adverse selection, ARACIS is also preoccupied with issues of moral hazard which can arise when universities or their study programmes fail to continuously meet the initial standards which served as the basis for their accreditation. However, the efforts of ARACIS to instil a quality culture in Romanian HEIs seem to have met with limited success, as evidenced, for example, by the finding that the institutional commissions for internal evaluation and quality assurance only have a discontinuous, quasi-formal activity (Vlăsceanu et al. 2010), an element which points to shirking on the part of HEIs. Overall, despite the intentions of policymakers, compliance with the minimum standards specified in the methodology of ARACIS is still the prevalent form of quality assurance which thus remains "preponderantly administrative, decoupled from (organic) processes of learning and teaching" (Păunescu et al. 2011).

4 Quality and Funding

However important for purposes of evaluation and accreditation, the methodology devised by ARACIS has not been the sole instrument of assessing (or indeed rewarding) quality in Romanian Higher education. In order to present a more complete picture of quality assessment, special attention must also be paid to a second aspect: the way in which (public) universities have actually been financed by the government. In this context, our paper focuses on only one feature of the evolution of the Romanian funding mechanism, namely the quality components used by the National Higher Education Funding Council (CNFIS) to distribute basic funding to universities.

The term *basic funding* was introduced in 1999 alongside a separate notion, that of *complementary funding*,[16] through a policy that marked the transition from an approach whereby public universities received funding "according to principles more or less inherited from the socialist period" (Miroiu and Aligica 2003) to a new mechanism of formula-based funding. With the introduction of formula-based funding the number of enrolled students became central to the funding scheme: the amount of funding received by a university became contingent on the number of physical students it enrolled, following a formula which attached different *equivalence coefficients* for each programme level (bachelor, PhD, etc.) and different *cost indicators* for each field of study (medical, technical, economic, etc.). The funding formula in effect translated the physical students a university had: first into equivalent students and then into unitary equivalent students; these could then be used to determine funding for each distinct university.

Although a remarkable break from previous practices, the initial formula for allocation of funds had a strictly quantitative approach inherent in its reliance on the single dimension of physical students and had the consequence that universities received funding in strict proportion to their number of (unitary equivalent) students (CNFIS 2007). The formula-based funding mechanism had two important consequences for universities (Vlăsceanu and Miroiu 2012): it put universities in a position to autonomously use their budget and it stimulated them to reduce operating costs; however, most universities reduced costs by decreasing the amount and the quality of facilities offered to students and by increasing the student/staff ratio (instead of developing a more responsible scheme for cost control). In this context the following potential access and equity paradox can be noted: since a university received funding in accordance with its number of students, it had direct and powerful incentives to enrol as many students as possible to ensure its survival; however, the more students it enrolled, the less it was able to provide them with adequate facilities and services.

Aware of this danger, policymakers began experimenting with a way to directly build into the funding formula a series of quality measures: starting in 2003 the formula incorporated several quality indicators which were meant to stimulate differential funding based on measurable aspects of institutional performance. Once introduced in 2003, the number and complexity of the indicators grew continually as did, more importantly, the final amount of funding determined through their use. Between 2003 and 2011 the number of indicators increased from 4 to 17 (some having a complex structure determined by numerous sub-indicators). At the same time, the level of basic funding these quality indicators determined expanded from 12.7 to 30 %.

[16] Basic funding (which still represents the better part of public financial support received by universities) included expenses with salaries of university personnel and various material costs, while complementary funding referred to subsidies for students, funds for equipment and major renovation, but also to funds allocated on a competitive basis for scientific research. The two notions appeared in a major change of the Law of education no 84/1995 which was passed through Parliament in June 1999.

Starting in 2003 the total amount of basic funding was thus divided into two distinct components: a quantitative component relying on the number of students and a qualitative component influenced by the universities' individual level of performance. The quality indicators were grouped into categories mainly dealing with the following issues: (1) teaching staff (2) research (3) material resources, and (4) academic and administrative management of the university. Table 1 below provides a detailed list of these indicators and their individual weight in the process of allocating funding during three distinct years: 2006, 2009 and 2011; this is a period when the overall structure of the methodology used by CNFIS stabilized and yearly revisions focused more on the individual weights attached to the indicators, rather than on their content. Although an exhaustive description and treatment of these indicators is outside the scope of this paper, it is important to emphasize several aspects.

To begin with, it is obvious from the development of the indicators and their growing significance in funding allocation that there is a clear trend toward increased quality assessment leading to greater competition between universities. This competition is not only the result of monetary rewards (which need not always be substantial) but may also appear due to added legitimacy associated with higher scores which can serve as a powerful motivator for universities to improve their performance (Miroiu and Andreescu 2010). From an agency theory perspective, however, incorporation of such performance-oriented funding is a direct expression of concern with moral hazard problems resulting from a stable setting in which public universities, once accredited, receive funding in accordance with their number of students and therefore have no stimulus to improve their performance. Thus, changes in the funding mechanism are actually equivalent to a restructuring of the incentive system devised by the principal in order to assure accountability of the agents and greater competition among them.

A second aspect that merits attention is the nature of the distribution implied by the funding formula once the qualitative indicators were introduced: funding partly became a zero-sum game in which losses of one university with low scores on quality indicators were gains to another that had superior performance. However, because within the funding mechanism it was necessary to avoid the treatment of universities as "a-dimensional entities" (Ţeca 2011) the number of students (the quantitative component which already determined the better part of the total amount of basic funding) also had a powerful indirect influence on the qualitative side of the funding formula. In other words, within the framework of the zero-sum game determined by quality indicators, the quantitative aspect still played an important role, in effect determining the size of the reward (or penalty) for each university.[17]

[17] It is important to note that funding received by any individual university was not based on the *absolute* value (actual score) of its quality indicators, but on their *relative* value; to determine this relative value the absolute scores of each university were compared to those of all other universities within a formula that factored in the dimension of the university expressed as total number of unitary equivalent students; therefore two universities with very similar scores on a

Table 1 Quality Indicators and per cent of total basic funding they determined in 2006, 2009 and 2011

Group	Indicators	2006 (%)	2009 (%)	2011 (%)
1. Teaching staff	IC1- Ratio between full-time teaching staff and students	3.50	3.00	3.00
	IC2- Ratio between professors and students	–	1.00	1.00
	IC3- Ratio between associate professors and students	–	1.00	1.00
	IC4- Ratio between teaching staff having a PhD title and students	1.00	1.50	1.50
	IC5- Ratio between teaching staff below 35 years of age and students	1.50	2.00	2.00
2. Impact of research on the teaching process	IC6- Level of performance in scientific research (complex structure)	3.00	7.00	7.00
	IC7- Percent of students in master and doctorate programmes within the total number of students	–	1.00	1.00
	IC8- Percent ratio between the value of research contracts and the university's total income	0.50	1.00	1.00
3. Material resources	IC9- Ratio between expenses with endowments and investment and the number of physical students	1.00	1.50	1.00
	IC10- Ratio between material expenses and the number of physical students	1.00	1.00	1.00
	IC11- Ratio between expenses with books, journals and manuals and the number of physical students	0.50	1.00	1.00
4.University management	IC12- Percent of investment expenses within the total budgetary allocation received by universities for this purpose	0.50	0.50	0.00
	IC13- Overall quality of academic and administrative management (complex structure)	3.00	3.00	3.75
	IC14- Percent of income gained from sources other than budgetary allocation within the total income of the university	1.50	2.00	2.00
	IC15- Percent of income gained from other sources than budgetary allocation utilized for institutional development in the total income of the university	1.00	1.50	1.50

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Group	Indicators	2006 (%)	2009 (%)	2011 (%)
	IC16- Quality of social and administrative student services (complex structure)	2.00	2.00	2.00
Total per cent of basic funding determined:		20.00	30.00	30.00

Source CNFIS (2006), (2009) and (2011)

For quality indicators 1 through 7 "students" should be read as "unitary equivalent students"; quality indicators 1, 2 and 7 were present in the 2006 proposal of CNFIS but were not used in funding allocations following consultations with representatives of the Ministry of Education; quality indicator 12 for the year 2006 referred to the number of computers owned by the university per 1000 full-time students, not to investment expenses; in 2011, 0.25 % of the total 30 % allotted to the quality component was distributed following a newly introduced indicator (IC17) regarding lifelong learning

A final aspect worthy of mention is a certain shift in emphasis noticeable towards the end of the period during which quality indicators were used: although most indicators maintained a relatively constant weight throughout the entire period (see in particular *quality of social and administrative student services* which determined 2 % of the total amount of basic funding and which was mainly concerned with student dormitories), one indicator (the *level of performance in scientific research*) more than doubled in size. It had a complex structure, meaning it was actually made up of many other sub-indicators dealing with items such as the number of articles or books published by university staff and, compared to all other indicators, it was responsible for the largest amount of funding distributed on the grounds of quality assessment.

Although research played an important role in the funding allocations, starting in 2012 it came to have an even more prominent role in the higher education landscape following the introduction of the new comprehensive law on education (Law no 1/2011). This law required all universities to be classified into three distinct categories and all study programmes to be ranked according to their performance. Following a thorough evaluation, a university could be classified as focused on teaching, as focused on teaching and research, or as a research intensive university. In addition, all individual study programmes of accredited HEIs were ranked into five distinct categories ranging from A (best performance) to E (lowest performance).[18] The methodology[19] used in the process of university classification and

(Footnote 17 continued)
quality indicator could receive very different funding because of their different number of students. In effect small universities could win or lose much less than larger universities.

[18] Unlike the classification of universities which was intended to be functional and non-hierarchical in nature, the ranking of study programmes was expressly intended to be hierarchical in order to differentiate between the best programmes and those that had lower levels of performance.

[19] See OMECTS 5212/2011.

study programmes ranking relied on more than 60 distinct indicators grouped into four main criteria: (1) research performance;(2) teaching; (3) relation to the external environment; and (4) institutional capacity. Research was particularly important as it had a global weight ranging from 40 % (in the case of arts and humanities and certain social sciences) to 60 % (for mathematics, engineering and biomedical sciences).

In accordance with the new law, a first (and for the time being only) comprehensive evaluation of the universities and their study programmes was conducted in 2011.[20] The general structure of public funding devoted to universities also changed: in addition to basic and complementary funding a new category of *supplementary funding* was introduced (equivalent to 30.5 % of the basic funding), together with a distinct *institutional development fund*. Supplementary funding was further divided among three major components: (1) supplementary funding for excellence which accounted for 25 % of basic funding and which can be seen as a successor to the previous idea of distributing funds based on quality indicators; (2) preferential funding for master and PhD programmes in advanced science and technology, for programmes taught in foreign languages and for jointly supervised PhD programmes; and (3) a fund to support HEIs with an active local or regional role.

Since 2012, the former quality indicators used between 2003 and 2011 are no longer in operation, but quality constraints are instead incorporated into the funding mechanism through the use of the results of the national evaluation of universities and their study programmes.[21] This can be seen as "a recent preoccupation for unifying the different existing approaches to quality" (CNFIS 2013) because CNFIS replaced its own indicators with the results of the national evaluation. Operationalization of this idea entailed the use of certain *excellence indices* which became multiplication factors in the allocation of supplementary funding for excellence. The excellence indices reflect the results of the national ranking of study programmes. For example, at the bachelor level, a study programme belonging to class A (best performance) translated into an excellence index of 3, but 0 if the programme was ranked in class D or E (low performance). For master level studies, programmes ranked in class A received an excellence index of 4, those in B an index of 1 and those in C, D, and E received 0.[22]

Access and equity elements within the methodology used for the process of university classification and study programmes ranking included several indicators. Under *relation to external environment* one can find the following three indicators:

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[20] Although the law requires that the evaluation be done yearly, no such efforts were made in 2012 or up to the present moment in 2013. The Ministry of Education is currently defending itself in a lawsuit with a university which contested the results of the evaluation process.

[21] For full results of the study programmes ranking see http://chestionar.uefiscdi.ro/docs/programe_de_studii.pdf.

[22] In its proposed methodology for (2013), CNFIS has operated some adjustments to these indices that tend not to penalize less competitive programmes as much as the ones in 2012 but the methodology has not yet been adopted by the Ministry of Education.

students from lower socio-economic groups, mature students (defined as aged 30 years or more), and students with disabilities. Under *institutional capacity* one can find several other indicators dealing with student cafeterias, dormitories, personnel responsible with medical services, infrastructure devoted to students with disabilities, and personnel specifically employed to support students with disabilities.

Although the methodology used in the process of university classification and study programmes ranking thus seems to have more indicators dealing with equity and access issues, it remains doubtful whether these had any significant impact on the final results of classification and ranking and, following these processes, on the funding universities received in 2012. This claim may be supported by studying the methodology itself, the individual weights of the indicators and the aggregate weights of the criteria it used. To begin with, it should be noted that the methodology had several intermediate levels of aggregation: at the lowest level were individual indicators that were then aggregated into composite (intermediary) indicators[23] which, finally, were further aggregated into the four criteria listed in the previous paragraphs, namely research performance, teaching, relation to the external environment and institutional capacity. A natural consequence of such a hierarchical structure that uses multiple layers of indicators is that the overall impact of any one individual indicator tends to become diluted. With respect to the indicators dealing with equity and access elements this is particularly evident because at the most general level of aggregation, both *relation to external environment* and *institutional capacity* had, without exception, the smallest weight of all four criteria used by the Ministry (ranging between 5 and 20 %) but also had the largest number of individual indicators (more than 20 in each case).

However, the new methodology used by CNFIS starting in (2012) also included a different component that can account for access and equity. Based on the provisions of the Law no 1/2011, a special fund for stimulating the universities which develop policies addressed to students from disadvantaged groups was created (i.e. the fund to support HEIs with an active local or regional role mentioned above). Disadvantaged groups can be ethnic minorities (e.g. Roma), or people living in certain areas (rural areas, small towns, etc.).[24] In 2012 the funding for this component represented 3 % of the total allocations for universities that were distributed by CNFIS. Funds were allocated by the Ministry of Education mainly to universities located in small towns and which had study programmes aimed to satisfy local needs (CNFIS 2013).

[23] For example, the three individual indicators "students from lower socio-economic groups, mature students, and students with disabilities" were grouped under a composite indicator—relation with social environment—which itself had a weight of 0.05 within the larger frame of relation to external environment. It is highly doubtful whether 0.25 (the weight of the indicator dealing with student disabilities for example) within 0.05 within yet another, final, 0.20 could have any substantial impact on the final results of ranking and classification.

[24] Nonetheless, these categories have not been very clearly defined and no systematic study has been carried out yet in order to identify the needs of these groups.

5 Conclusions

Over the past two decades quality assessment and quality constraints have become a central feature in the process of policymaking for Romanian higher education. This article has illustrated how problems of adverse selection and moral hazard typical of principal-agent models have spurred Romanian governments to develop specific solutions in the form of normative constraints limiting the potentially opportunistic behaviour of universities. Prior to 2012 such quality constraints took two distinct shapes: one is given by the process of accreditation (together with its corollary, periodic academic evaluation), while the other is represented by specific indicators used to determine the level of funding for each public university. In both cases the complexity and number of indicators used for overall quality assessment increased over time. However, starting in 2012, quality indicators are no longer in use; quality is instead incorporated into the funding mechanism through a proxy measure – excellence indices derived from the results of the national process of study programmes ranking which relied heavily on research aspects.

In terms of aspects that promote equity and access, all methodologies pertaining to quality assessment discussed in this article can be found to incorporate only a limited number of indicators devoted to such issues. In addition, rather than dealing with targeted measures for specific (potentially more vulnerable) groups of students, most of these indicators only concern themselves with material resources and minimal facilities and services for all students in general. The scope and importance of these indicators varies between the distinct methodologies under discussion: within the methodologies used by CNFIS between 2003 and 2011 such indicators generally accounted for 2 % of the basic funding allocated to universities and mainly dealt with student dormitories and general administrative services; within the methodology for accreditation used by ARACIS the three indicators we identified also deal with input aspects related to the universities' distribution of material resources and services provided to students. A more comprehensive list of indicators sensitive to equity and access issues can be found in the methodology used to assess universities and their study programmes in 2011 but, paradoxically, the effects of these indicators is diluted by the existence of dozens of other indicators and by the presence of intermediary levels of aggregation to which the indicators contribute only to a negligible degree.

Overall, based on these methodologies and their evolution we may conclude that general quality considerations play an increasingly important role for higher education institutions and their funding, but equity and access elements do not act as important factors within quality assessment processes themselves. This does not mean, however, that equity and access have no impact on funding itself. To the contrary, although such elements are limited within the various frameworks of quality and performance evaluation, they have also been recently included in the funding mechanism in a more direct manner, through the provision of a distinct component within the newly-introduced supplementary funding. Therefore, the impact of equity and access elements for Romanian HEIs is now twofold: on one

hand this impact is indirect (and limited), mediated by the processes of accreditation and performance assessment which have their distinct leverage on funding; on the other hand, however, the impact is also taking a more explicit form through specification of a distinct component geared towards equity and access issues in the funding scheme. The inclusion of this distinct component may indicate a growing importance assigned by policymakers to equity and access in general but, because objective criteria for distribution of these earmarked funds have yet to be clearly formulated, it remains to be seen what substantial consequences this policy will have for HEIs and their students.

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Building and Deepening a Comprehensive Strategy to Internationalise Romanian Higher Education

Hans de Wit and Laura C. Engel

Keywords Internationalisation · Higher education · Romania · Mobility · Curriculum

1 Introduction

Now more than ever, internationalisation of education has captured the attention of education policy-makers and practitioners at national and institutional levels. In the last few years, more countries have begun to develop national strategies for internationalisation of education (either at higher or secondary education levels), including in the United States (U.S.) (Department of Education 2012), Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2013), Canada (Government of Canada 2012), and Ireland (Report of the High-Level Group on International Education to the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills 2010), among others. At a regional level, the European Commission (2013) recently released a higher education communication, 'European higher education in the world', which encourages internationalisation as

H. de Wit (✉)
Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (CHEI), Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy
e-mail: hans.dewit@unicatt.it

H. de Wit
Internationalisation Higher Education, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam, Netherlands

H. de Wit
Unit for Higher Education Internationalisation in the Developing World, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

L.C. Engel
International Education and International Affairs, The George Washington University, Washington, United States of America
e-mail: Lce@gwu.edu

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central to meeting Europe 2020 benchmarks and addressing broader global challenges facing the region. Further, higher education institutions are also developing strategies of internationalisation. For example, in a European University Association (2013) study of 175 higher education institutions across 38 European countries, 99 % responded that their institution had a strategy in place, was in the process of developing one, or had considered internationalisation in other institutional strategies. The International Association of Universities (IAU) (2010) survey on internationalisation of higher education showed that 89 % of institutions worldwide indicate that internationalisation is part of their institutional mission statement, which is an increase of 78 % compared to the survey conducted 3 years before (Green et al. 2012, p. 440).

Beyond institutional and national strategies, there is also a growth in global student mobility and increased competition in attracting international students. For example, from 2000 to 2010, the number of globally mobile students grew from 2.1 million to 4.1 million, an annual increase of 7.2 % (OECD 2012; UEFISCDI 2013). The majority of these students (77 %) choose to study in an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country, with the U.S., U.K., Australia and Canada topping the list of host countries (OECD 2012). Despite this trend, there is increased competition for international students as regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania and Asia, become increasingly attractive destinations. In the last decade, the dominance of the three leading destinations has remained relatively steady (OECD 2012). In 2000, 39 % of globally mobile students were enrolled either in the U.S. (23 %), U.K. (11 %), or Australia (5 %). This aggregate share declined slightly to 37 % in 2010, with the U.S. hosting 17 %, U.K. 13 %, and Australia 7 %. The other two leading nations for a long time, Germany and France, have stayed also in the top five, although they differ in several ways from the other top destinations: first of all by their languages, which is not English, the dominant global language in education currently; secondly by their tuition fees, which are much lower than in the other three countries, and thirdly—in particular in the case of France - by the background of their students, which is more diverse and more related to this country's historical ties, and cultural and linguistic area of influence (Choudaha and de Wit forthcoming).

Although it represents less than a tenth of the world's total population, Europe is and has been doing remarkably well in attracting degree-seeking foreign students. Over the last 10 years, it has in fact been the most popular continent for study abroad, receiving more than half of all students who studied towards a degree outside their country of origin. In contrast to other major study destinations, like the U.S.—whose 'market share' has continuously dropped after 2001—Europe has managed to preserve its position on the global education market, despite growing competition from non-traditional study destinations like China, India or Japan. In 2006/07, 1.5 million foreign full-degree students studied in 32 European countries —an all-time high, corresponding to 6.9 % of all students enrolled in this region of the world and 50.9 % of the total number of foreign students worldwide (Teichler et al. 2011). The number of foreign students in Europe has unquestionably gone through a marked increase from 1998/99 levels, when the number of foreign

nationality students enrolled in Europe stood at only 827,000. Equally interesting, the number of foreign students in Europe increased at a much faster pace than the total number of students pursuing higher education studies in this region—which could point to Europe's increased attractiveness as a study destination, and also to a declining population of young people (Teichler et al. 2011). The European Commission, in its 2011 document 'Supporting growth and jobs—an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems' concludes for the future: "Attracting the best students, academics and researchers from outside the EU and developing new forms of cross-border cooperation are key drivers of quality" (p. 6) and intends to "promote the EU as a study and research destination for top talent from around the world" (p. 14).

In spite of the increase in rhetoric of internationalisation and the growth in global student mobility, the concrete aims and actions related to internationalisation taken by higher education institutions vary. Against a framework of literature related to approaches and aims of internationalisation of education, this chapter explores some of these varying institutional practices of internationalisation within the national context of Romania. One of the deepest forms of internationalisation is a process approach (de Wit 2002; Knight 1999), in which institutions engage in a comprehensive strategy of infusing international perspectives into all aspects of teaching and learning. Yet, from case studies of five Romanian higher education institutions, the predominant vision for internationalisation was most often fairly strictly linked with mobility, specifically the increase in numbers of incoming and outgoing students and staff, primarily credit mobility within European programmes. And the instruments to stimulate this type of mobility were primarily the increase of bilateral agreements and of courses offered in English.

While significant, this form of internationalisation alone (fitting in the category of 'internationalisation abroad' according to the distinction in two components of internationalisation by Knight 2008) is not likely to lead to the development of global competence and mind-set for the majority of Romanian students, nor assist universities in creating a comprehensive internationalisation strategy with an equally strong focus on the other component, 'internationalisation at home'. Knight (2008) describes these two forms of internationalisation of education as inward and outward. *Internationalization at home* (inward) signifies a set of strategies and approaches to develop activities that help students' international understanding and intercultural skills, whereas *internationalization abroad* (outward) signifies cross-border mobility of students, teachers, scholars, programs, courses, curriculum and projects. These two components are not mutually exclusive but together encompass the broad scope of internationalisation of higher education in the current era.

Not only in Romania, but quite generally around the world, the focus in internationalisation of higher education is more on the 'abroad' component than on the 'at home' component. For instance, a survey of 38 European countries showed that for 175 higher education institutions, the number one goal for internationalisation was attracting international students (European University Association 2013). Although mobility is of course significant, it is not sufficient alone to meet the broader stated goals of developing global competence or mind-set. It is becoming

more manifest than the abroad dimension of internationalisation, although in absolute numbers impressive, in percentages only reaches a small number of students and scholars and by that is both elitist and in its impact, limited. Also, several authors (for instance Leask 2005; Otten 2003; Teekens 2003, among others) consider it a misconception (de Wit 2012) that students acquire global or intercultural competences automatically by studying abroad. To realize a goal of more globally competent students and staff, mobility may not be the strategy with the greatest impact. Rather, internationalisation of the curriculum and the teaching and learning process is a more appropriate strategy, in which the outward dimension has to be integrated.

2 Approaches and Rationales for Internationalization

With globalisation, the world has become more interconnected, easing the flow of ideas, capital, and people across borders. Spring (2008) argued that globalisation of education referred to the ideas, decisions, institutions and organizations, and policy formation processes occurring at a global scale, which are understood to be affecting local, sub-national, national, and supra-national education systems, informing ideas and ideologies about education. One of the policy and institutional responses to these broader global processes is internationalisation of education, which Knight (2008) defines as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into higher education's major functions and delivery modes at both the institutional and national levels" (p. ix). One of the central objectives of internationalisation strategies in education is to build a set of attitudes, beliefs, skills, and dispositions of individuals so that they are able to engage with their local and national communities, as well as the broader global world.

Within the academic literature, there has been growing attention to internationalisation of education. A broad search of literature related to 'internationalization' and 'education', on the JSTOR database reveals that there were 6,940 articles, books and pamphlets published from 1993 to 2013. On the ERIC database, a similar search shows the growth in academic literature from 282 articles in the 10 year period from 1992 to 2002 and 703 articles from 2003 to 2013. In addition to the academic literature, there is a growth in internationalisation of education as a profession. As de Wit and Urias (2012) observe, "The study of the internationalization of higher education has developed rapidly over the past two decades" (p. 101) and "one can see an increase in students and practitioners who consider international education a specialized career and look for master's and doctoral programs, as well as professional training modules" (p. 109).

Within the body of literature on internationalisation of higher education, there are a variety of rationales among both policy-makers and practitioners in favour of internationalisation. de Wit (2002) categorized these as political, economic, social/cultural, and academic. An economic rationale may highlight skills and competencies necessary for individual citizens to be successful within the global economy,

or highlight internationalisation as key to the long term economic success of a country, whereas a political rationale may emphasize the need for diplomacy and cross-cultural exchange, or see internationalisation as an important component of national security and/or capacity building. Social/cultural rationales highlight either the personal development dimension of higher education or the role of higher education in civic and cultural engagement. Academic rationales are strongly related to the status and branding of institutions and systems of higher education, the link to international standards and the extension of the horizon of research and/or education.

Often there is a blend of multiple rationales within strategies of internationalisation. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's (2012) international education strategy appears to be underscored by several of the rationales described above, with its emphasis on internationalisation as central to economic prosperity and jobs, global challenges, national security and diplomacy, and the diversity within U.S. society (for further analysis of these rationales underlying the U.S. internationalisation strategy, see Engel et al. 2013). The recent communication of the European Commission (2013) in its three key pillars, *Mobility* and the recognition which this requires; *Internationalisation at home*, including digital learning; and *Strategic cooperation and partnership*, including capacity, also combines different rationales. These three priorities are in and of themselves not new; however, they do provide the rationales for, as well as reflection in their comprehensiveness and recognition at the EU level, a foundation to enhance the internationalisation of the European higher education sector in the coming years.

These distinct rationales tend to guide the different approaches to internationalisation. Knight (1999) distinguishes between four main approaches to internationalisation of education. These are activity, competency, ethos, and process approaches. The *activity approach* includes actions related to the exchange of students or staff and technical assistance. It often focuses more narrowly on one or more specific activities or programmes, which can be isolated from other areas of education and specific to only a sub-set of students or staff. Often, the most popular form of the activity approach is mobility related, with an objective to increase the numbers of incoming or outgoing students. The *competency approach* highlights the development of competencies, both at the level of students and staff. Quite distinct from the skills approach is the *ethos or values-based approach*, which includes developing a culture to support internationalisation. Lastly, the *process approach* is arguably the deepest form, as it focuses not on distinct or isolated activities, but on integrating an international dimension into research and service through activities, policies, and procedures (Knight 1999). It is considered the deepest form of internationalisation, as it has the potential to involve aspects of the other three approaches (activities, competencies, ethos), and be infused into the context and culture of an education system or institution. For instance, mobility (or the outward dimension) is integrated into a broader teaching and learning process. In this way, rather than affecting only a small proportion of students and staff through a singular, and at times 'add on' approach, internationalisation as a process can enhance global mind-set and competence, as well as deepen the experience of internationalisation outside of a

singular abroad opportunity. Moreover, the process approach may be the most useful approach for assisting institutions in developing a comprehensive internationalisation strategy. Currently, it is also referred to as comprehensive internationalisation (Hudzik 2011).

We argue that internationalisation becomes deepest and most extensive when it is infused throughout the teaching and learning process, enriching global competences and perspectives for the majority of students and staff, not only a select few engaged in a single activity. According to Boix Mansilla and Jackson (2011), global competence is "the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance" (p. xi). In a framework developed by the Asia Society, the four dimensions of education for global competence include student investigations of the world, recognition of students' own perspectives and others different from their own, the ability to communicate ideas to diverse audiences, and taking action based on knowledge and perspectives gained (Boix Mansilla and Jackson 2011).

Infused within these four dimensions is what Rizvi (2007) had earlier referred to as global-local reflexivity, which aims to build a deep and extensive form of global competence within the home campus. In an approach that aims to build global-local reflexivity, 'the global' is not abstract or separate from the everyday life of the campus or school, something that the university either sends its students and staff to go and 'get', or receives students and staff from. Rather, it views 'the global' as part and parcel of the lives of students, staff, and the university. It is not primarily "concerned with imparting knowledge and developing attitudes and skills for understanding other cultures per se" (Rizvi 2007, p. 6). Rather, a reflexive approach helps students to explore "the ways in which global processes are creating conditions of economic and cultural exchange that are transforming our identities and communities; and that, reflexively, we may be contributing to the production and reproduction of those conditions, through our uncritical acceptance of the dominant ways of thinking about global interconnectivity" (p. 6). It places students, staff and individuals at the center of global processes. Internationalisation then is about asking students to understand and ask critical questions about their place in the world and the ways in which they are actors in global processes, and how in turn they are affected by broader global processes.

This approach to internationalisation requires considerable strategic thought (*the what, how, why*) and a deepening of internationalisation (not simply a 'more is better' approach limited to cross-border mobility). Hudzik (2011) defines comprehensive internationalisation as both a commitment and action "to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education…it is an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility" (p. 6). Although the process approach is the deepest form of internationalisation, in most systems around the world, both at a national and institutional level, the activity approach often is the most common (de Wit 2013), as also shown in the Romanian case.

3 Methodology

The chapter draws on data and findings from the research project, 'Higher education evidence-based policy making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania', carried out by The Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI). As part of the project, there was a focus on two central dimensions (equity and internationalization). The project team included members of UEFISCDI, the International Association of Universities (IAU), and a team of national and international experts. Throughout 2013, the authors participated in the project as international experts on the project dimension of internationalisation. In that role, we participated in mutual learning workshops with the UEFCISDI/IAU team members and other international and national experts, as well as in the project design. Either one or both of us also participated in each of the five institutional site visits to the universities participating in the project, and were each involved with analysis of the project findings.

The project drew on institutional analysis based on the 'Internationalization strategies advisory service' (ISAS) of the IAU (http://www.iau-aiu.net/content/isas). The ISAS approach is structured around analysis of institutional strategies of internationalisation through a process of self-study and peer learning. Universities were invited on a voluntary basis to take part in the project. Five universities participated, including both public and private universities from different areas of Romania, providing an array of institutional practices in internationalisation. The universities first completed the Internationalisation Self-Study according to a Guide, adapted by the project team from the ISAS framework. Each self-study report was then analysed by the project team. From May–September, 2013, site visits to each of the participating institutions was conducted by members of the project team and national and international experts. The institutional visit was carried out over the course of one day, and aimed to assess both the policies and practices of the institutions with respect to internationalisation of education, as well as gather the perspectives, experiences, and opinions of university representatives about national and institutional level internationalisation. During each visit, interviews were conducted with university representatives, including high level university administrators, deans, faculty, staff, and students.

The project report (UEFISCDI 2013) provides the full findings related both to internationalisation of higher education at a national and institutional level, and the policy recommendations emerging from the project. In this chapter, we are drawing on select findings related to two key dimensions of internationalisation of higher education at the national and institutional level as described above: the importance of the European context and the lack of comprehensive strategies for internationalisation. Related issues are the focus on internationalisation abroad, although rather marginal in performance, and the lack of a strategy to enhance internationalisation at home, although in words it is embraced as important.

4 Internationalisation of Higher Education in Romania Within the European Context

With the Bologna Declaration in 1999, governments of 47 countries made a commitment to harmonize their higher education systems through a range of actions, including those specifically related to internationalisation of higher education. The broader goals were to create a more competitive and attractive European higher education system and to enhance cross-border student mobility and employability. Ten years later in 2009 in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve and in 2012 in Bucharest, Ministers emphasised the importance of quality higher education to build lifelong learning and employability (UEFISCDI 2013). For the immediate 2012–2015 timeframe, the 47 countries of the European Higher Education Area prioritise mobility as a way to foster quality higher education for all and strengthen graduates' employability. In 2012, the Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area was launched (European Higher Education Area 2012).

While mobility is one of the central aims of these European initiatives, recent European Union developments have emphasized other dimensions of internationalisation. In 2013, the European Commission released the Communication, 'European higher education in the world', which was a response to the Council conclusions (2010) on the internationalisation of higher education. The 2013 Communication prioritizes internationalisation as at the core of advancing the Europe 2020 objectives. As mentioned above, it encourages both member states and individual higher education institutions to consider three main priorities in their efforts to develop more comprehensive approaches to internationalisation. These include advancing international student and staff mobility, internationalisation of home through curricula and digital learning, and strategic cooperation and academic partnerships (European Commission 2013).

Strongly driven by the European initiatives and programmes in the s, both at a national level and within individual higher education institutions, Romania has placed an increased focus on internationalisation of higher education. Beginning in the 1990s, a vision for an internationalised higher education system in Romania began to develop. Before this point, there was, under the Ceausescu regime, a focus on growing the enrolments of foreign students through provision of Romanian language courses, specialized university regulations, or mechanisms of financial assistance (UEFISCDI 2013). As Romania joined Socrates and Erasmus in the 1990s, the influx of international students began to be diversified. During this same period, there were Ministry of Education programs offered in foreign languages (UEFISCDI 2013). As a result, the number of foreign degree seeking students and credit seeking students steadily grew. In 2002–2003, the number of foreign degree students reached 9,830 (1.69 % of total students) and the total number of credit seeking students in 2009 was 15,391 (UEFISCDI 2013). Though comprehensive data are difficult to access, as there are no centralized data collection mechanisms, there are about four times more outgoing Erasmus students than incoming Erasmus students, and about 3.5 times more outgoing students (total) from incoming students (UEFISCDI 2013).

New developments in the internationalisation of Romanian higher education include cross-border developments. According to the 2013–2016 Romanian Government Program on Education, internationalisation of education is important "to continue to strengthen international bilateral and multilateral partnerships, foster exchanges of students, teachers, in the existing programs and developing new ways of international cooperation" (UEFISCDI 2013). In the past 2 years, two universities (Maritime University of Constanta and "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati) have opened branch campuses in other countries, including in Kazakstan and the Republic of Moldova. There is also a well-established pattern of cross-border partnerships between Romanian and German universities, with approximately 357 partnerships on record, and with Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine through the Phare Programme (UEFISCDI 2013).

Although one can observe a gradual increase over the past few years in degree and credit mobility and cross-border delivery of programmes, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of all students and programmes, Romania is underperforming compared to most other European countries. Even if we compare Romania to neighbouring countries like Bulgaria (3.5 %), Hungary (3.5 %) and Slovenia (1.3 %), Romania has relatively low numbers of incoming students as a percentage of the total student population. Out of 33 European countries, only Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey have lower percentages than the 1.3 % for Romania. The same can be said of the ratio of students enrolled abroad to nationals enrolled at home, where Romania with 0.027 is among the ten lower performing countries, although that also applies to countries like U.K., Spain and Italy (de Wit et al. 2012, p. 5–6). In the context of the new policy of the Commission, the rather exclusive focus on but limited success in the first pillar (mobility), requires a rethinking of the national and institutional approach to internationalisation.

5 Internationalisation Strategies of Romanian Higher Education Institutions

As argued by Hudzik (2011), comprehensive internationalisation at an institutional level requires both institutional strategy and action in order to infuse international perspectives into all aspects of university life. In the European University Association (2013) study of 175 institutions in 38 European countries, 56 % indicated that the institution either has a strategy of internationalisation in place, 30 % considered internationalisation in other institutional strategies, and 13 % were planning to develop an internationalisation strategy. The survey results also showed that participants view strategies as having a significant impact on new overseas partnerships, increased outward student mobility, increased incoming international students, numbers of English courses, and initiating joint/double degrees. In Romania, of the five institutional cases in the study, only one had a concrete written strategic document. However, all of the institutional representatives indicated that they were in the process of developing an institutional strategy for internationalisation, first

exploring examples of internationalisation strategies used in the U.S., Australia and other European countries.

As representatives of the five institutions discussed their goals for internationalisation, it was evident that their rationales varied widely. Among the concrete goals articulated were the development of higher quality foreign language degree programmes (in French or primarily in English); the development of joint degree programmes; enhancing the prestige of the institution through cross-national research projects; increased cooperative partnerships and networks with universities overseas; increasing more student and staff mobility; enhancing support for incoming and outgoing students; and the promotion of Romanian language and culture abroad (UEFISCDI 2013). These are a diverse set of activities, which were often not linked or integrated into a comprehensive internationalisation strategy.

Although representatives articulated an array of different goals, in general, Romanian higher education institutions seemed most concerned with outward and inward mobility of students and staff, as well as partnerships and cross-border relationships. This concern with mobility and partnerships dictated the institutional approaches to internationalisation which the institutions adopted. For example, one of the case universities in the study had recently signed a contract with an African country to train 200 of its students at the university in Romania, a program which the Romanian institutional representatives aimed to repeat annually. The opportunity for cross-border partnership of this kind appears to have great potential to assist in the institutional internationalisation. Yet, the focus appeared largely on the institutional gains from inward student mobility, as well as limited cultural and institutional orientations of foreign students to Romanian life. Absent were any initiatives or plans to grow the global competence of Romanian students through the opportunity, such as through planned intercultural learning activities between Romanian and foreign students, or to benefit from incoming international students in internationalising the curriculum.

With the dominant focus on mobility, as well as partnerships and cross-border relationships, there is little evidence specific to how higher education institutions in Romania have developed and implemented strategies related to internationalisation at home. Certainly, Romanian higher education institutions' policies and curriculum have been impacted by the use of European Credit Transfer System, the restructuring of Romanian higher education to comply with the three Bologna-cycles, and broader quality assurance frameworks within the European Higher Education Area. Yet, despite these changes, there is no evidence of any Romanian institution developing a vision or strategy specifically related to internationalisation at home. And where such an approach exists it is primarily focussed on the development of courses and programmes in other languages and improvement of the foreign language skills of staff and students. Although there are some valuable examples of courses and programmes in other foreign languages (French, Italian and German) the primary interest appears to be in developing courses and programmes in English (and related recruitment of international students from the non-European, mainly Asian, market) and improvement of English language skills. One can question the impact of such an approach, given that it prepares for opportunities to and assumes

success in competing effectively on the global/international student market, and ignores the opportunities in neighbouring countries and markets closer to the Romanian language.

6 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have placed the development of internationalisation of Romanian higher education in the context of the conceptual evolution of internationalisation, in particular the trend towards a more comprehensive strategy and a greater focus within such a comprehensive strategy on the 'at home' component of internationalisation. On the basis of the project, 'Higher education evidence-based policy making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania', carried out by The Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI 2013) and assessment of the internationalisation policies of the five institutions of higher education within that project, we have identified some key trends and challenges for Romanian higher education in its efforts to become both more European and international. We observe that the European Union policies and programmes are driving the agenda, but also notice a lack of comprehensive strategies for internationalisation at the national and institutional level. We also observe a rather exclusive focus on internationalisation abroad, although the impact of that approach is relatively marginal, and we have identified a lack of a strategy to enhance internationalisation at home, although in theory, it is embraced as important by Romanian higher education institutional representatives.

Against a body of literature focused on the different forms of internationalisation, Romanian institutions remain focused on the activity approach, promoting the mobility of students, staff, and international students. Mobility in and of itself is an important component of internationalisation; however, in an isolated form, not integrated in the curriculum, it is not sufficient or effective. It is not part of a comprehensive strategy, often regarded within a 'more is better' framework, and is not seen to be linked to the overall quality of the education system.

To deepen internationalisation at an institutional level for the majority of higher education student populations, institutions require a more comprehensive approach, which entails:

(a) Development of skills, competences, attitudes, and values
(b) A culture to support international/intercultural perspectives
(c) Attention to the link between internationalisation and overall educational quality
(d) Integration of reflexivity into everyday school life
(e) Greater access of all students to internationalisation.

By furthering these elements, it is possible that internationalisation can further both the goals of educational quality and educational equity, rather than remain a limited opportunity only for a select group of students within an institution.

Internationalisation is not an aim in and of itself; it is a mechanism for improving the overall quality of education (de Wit 2011, 2013; Qiang 2013). Institutions are required to tap into all of the different policy levers of internationalisation, not simply growing mobility and partnerships and/or teaching in English. On the one hand, this might help higher education institutions work toward their wider goals of enhancing quality of teaching, learning, and student services. On the other hand, it requires a more substantial and strategic initiative, not only toward internationalisation through programming, but a deeper internationalisation infused throughout many dimensions of the institution.

The issues related to internationalisation of higher education in Romania that we have highlighted in the chapter are also reflected in internationalisation trends in countries around the world. Indeed, much can be learned from the Romanian case. Despite the increase in strategies, mission statements and institutional rhetorical commitments to internationalisation, mobility (as part of the activity approach) often remains the leading practice prioritized at national and institutional levels in countries around the world. Despite the growth in global student mobility and the changing patterns of student flows, the vast majority of students around the world do not and will not study abroad. Those who do are typically among the more privileged who can afford to pursue a study abroad opportunity. Moreover, of those who do study abroad, roughly 77 % choose to study abroad in an OECD country (OECD 2012), and in Europe, within Europe.

Arguably, the globalized world requires students to have expanded and deeper global competence, which includes the ability to communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds and the ability to connect and think reflexively about global influences on local and national communities. This requires a more expansive form of global competence for all students, which can only be achieved in the context of more comprehensive internationalisation at home strategies. Of course, foreign languages and mobility experiences are significant. However, alone they will not yield the expansion of global competence for all students.

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National Strategies and Practices in Internationalisation of Higher Education: Lessons from a Cross-Country Comparison

Liviu Matei and Julia Iwinska

Keywords National internationalization strategy · Higher education system · Comparative higher education · International student recruitment

1 Introduction

Internationalisation is not a new or overlooked phenomenon in higher education. For over two decades by now it has attracted increasing attention both in the policy arena, at institutional, national, or international level, as well as in the scholarly literature on higher education policy (Knight 1999; Kehm 2003; Altbach and Knight 2007; Kehm and Teichler 2007; Teichler 2012). Internationalisation of higher education is a global phenomenon affecting all countries of the world. There are considerable differences, however, across countries in what drives the process, how important it is deemed, how it is understood and managed, or what the expected outcomes are. The understanding of the concept of internationalisation remains diverse also among the various higher education stakeholders. Many view it as equivalent to international student mobility. Others look beyond student mobility and mobility programmes (like the Erasmus programme in Europe) and see the process as much more complex, which includes activities such as building international communication networks in higher education, building and expansion of international cooperation networks (for example in research), internationalisation of curricula, establishing international joint degree programs, staff mobility, and, more recently, opening branch campuses abroad, or 'virtual mobility'. The rationales behind various institutional-level efforts, or broader system-level approaches to internationalisation can also differ. National policy makers in different countries

L. Matei (✉) · J. Iwinska
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
e-mail: mateil@ceu.hu

J. Iwinska
e-mail: iwinskaj@ceu.hu

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can be selectively motivated by one or a combination of reasons, usually including: national competitiveness and economic development, geopolitical aspects, or demographic concerns. Institutional leaders, on the other hand, might be more interested in the opportunities of bringing new talent from abroad to their institutions, joining international research networks or in generating additional income for their institutions.

One important question that could be asked in this context is whether the existence of a national strategy for internationalisation has a positive impact or whether such a strategy is even at all necessary? Some may argue that it could be more efficient if it was left to the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves to decide what to do. It appears, however, that the currently favoured model for advancing internationalisation in Europe, which is also promoted by the European Commission, calls for more centralised and comprehensive strategic approaches, which should address both broader national priorities and institutional interests. (European Commission 2013; Kehm and Teichler 2007). As suggested by the responses from 175 higher education institutions across 38 countries to a recent survey on internationalisation conducted by the European University Association (EUA), having an ***EU-level internationalisation strategy*** could further stimulate development of national strategies, which in turn would have positive effects on the institutional efforts in this area, and would attract the much needed public attention to the topic in general (EUA 2013). Having a well-defined and coherent strategy on the national level is also mentioned as an important factor for advancing internationalisation efforts in a study published by the British Council (2011). Other than simply having an internationalisation strategy at national level, it has also been argued that in order for such strategy to be effective it should be broad in its scope and closely connected with other national priority areas including economic development, science and technology, migration and trade (ibid).

Taking note of the diversity of internationalisation approaches that exist in Europe at present, the article seeks to analyse and compare system level settings in four countries. Specifically, it looks at Poland, Germany, Estonia and Romania, which appear to be at different stages with regard to their overall internationalisation efforts and strategy development. The article aims not only to compare formal internationalisation strategies, where they exist, but also to analyse alternative approaches and mechanisms at work where a government-level, or national strategy is missing. Furthermore, the article outlines and compares key aspects of strategies or strategic approaches, such as: the actors involved in and driving the internationalisation process, the key elements of the strategies, the goals and targets set nationally, the support structures and resources.

The research is based primarily on the analysis of national policy documents, such as internationalisation strategies, national strategies for higher education or national migration strategies, as well as on research articles on higher education policies and on internationalisation. We note that at this stage not much data is available on the impact assessment of national-level internationalisation strategies.

In addition to simply presenting findings from the four-country comparison, the article also raises broader questions regarding the role a national strategy for

internationalisation of higher education can or should play, what aspects and stakeholders such a strategy might involve, as well as what alternative approaches can be used instead of a formal national strategy. The study's conclusions raise questions and provides some preliminary rather than final answers about what might work better in terms of internationalisation strategies and practices for a country like Romania.

In this way, the article aims primarily to contribute to the ongoing debate on higher education in Romania, to the process of development of a national strategy for higher education in this country (currently missing), and in particular to the debate about a national internationalisation strategy for higher education.

2 The European Context

The European Commission (EC), in its recent Communication on "European higher education in the world" (EC 2013), reiterates once again the belief in the importance of internationalisation for Europe, and attempts to put the topic firmly on the agenda for the coming years. The document itself represents a blue-print for a broad internationalisation strategy, which identifies priority areas and strategic directions for the sector at EU/European level. Moreover, this strategy is expected to be supported by funds secured under the EU multiannual financial framework 2014–20, in particular by part of the over EUR 14 billion that will be allocated to the ERASMUS+ programme. By presenting an internationalisation strategy for European higher education, the Commission not only calls the universities "to think global" but it also emphasises the importance of having such strategies on the national system level. Following on previous documents from the European Union institutions, in particular on the series of communications on the modernisation of higher education (EC 2003, 2006, 2011), the 2013 Communication is meant as a guiding tool for the Member States to help them develop their own customised approaches to internationalisation, and the Commission assures of its readiness to assist in that process (EC 2013).

In Europe, the number of countries that have comprehensive internationalisation strategies for higher education does not seem too high at present. There are several countries, however, like Germany, which have comprehensive, almost "all-encompassing" formal strategies in place, and are well on the way or in the process of implementing them on various levels. Interestingly, there are also countries that have well-articulated internationalisation strategies, like Estonia, but they seem to be focused on particular aspects of internationalisation, rather than adopting a comprehensive approach. Estonia, to continue with one of our case studies, focuses on international student recruitment, and more specifically recruitment of master and doctoral students. There are other countries that promote targeted international student recruitment strategies on the national level as their model of an internationalisation strategy for higher education. For more information on this topic and for more examples, one could refer to a study by the Netherlands Organisation for

International Cooperation's (Nuffic) on national government policies in the area of international student recruitment and student mobility covering 11 countries including the Netherlands, UK, Germany, Switzerland and France from Europe.[1] The target audience, as stated in the report, was the Dutch policy makers and recruiters at national and institutional levels, who can use the collected data exactly in the process of development of international student recruitment strategies and policies (Becker and Kolster 2012).

Other countries in Europe, including some of the "new" EU Member States, are in less advanced stages of development of any kind of national strategies in higher education, including regarding internationalisation. Romania, for example, is only starting the process to develop a comprehensive national strategy for higher education, which will eventually incorporate a separate sub-strategy for internationalisation. It is our understanding, based on private reports, that the process is currently at the stage of technical consultations with international experts. We have not been able to access any documents about this process. Slovakia also does not have a strategy in place at present but, as we have learnt informally from a local higher education expert, it is also planning to develop one in the near future. On the other hand, in Poland, bottom-up approaches driven by the Rectors' Conference in cooperation with a non-governmental organisation and local authorities are more visible than government-level activities (Siwinska 2009).

To conclude this section, the recommendation for more comprehensive, national strategies for internationalisation, as encouraged by the Commission, certainly invites a closer examination of the existing system-level approaches in Europe, how they are constructed (when they exist), and also how they work in practice. The present study is a non-exhaustive attempt at providing preliminary information for such an examination.

3 What Is a Good Internationalisation Strategy in Europe?

The European Commission's view on what a good national strategy for internationalisation of higher education can be inferred from the Communication mentioned above (EC 2013) and preceding documents. The EC endorses a cross-sector approach, indicating that an internationalisation strategy for higher education should be coordinated with and support the relevant national polices for external cooperation, international development, migration, trade, employment, regional development and research and innovation. Other authoritative actors in internationalisation elaborate along the same lines, adding, for example, that a well-developed internationalisation strategy is typically led by the relevant ministry and if possible captures broader policy goals (British Council 2011). Among the various

[1] Other countries analysed in the study were: the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and China. .

recommendations in this area put forward by authoritative sources, the focus on the coordination with the other policy areas such as migration, trade and economic development, research, science, and technology are highlighted as particularly relevant and important for national higher education internationalisation strategies in Europe. In our own study, it appears that only one country, Germany, lives up to these expectations, while another one, Estonia, appears to aim at reaching similarly ambitious goals by a more selective, strategic approach. The other two countries, Poland and Romania, appear to be quite far, or very far, respectively, from meeting such high standards.

The European Commission further states that a national internationalisation strategy should be developed individually and customised based on each country's unique set of circumstances rather than in the "one-size-fits-all" spirit (EC 2013). However, in this Communication about European higher education in the world, the Commission also provides quite detailed guidelines for the Member States regarding which **common key areas** to include when developing individual national internationalisation approaches for higher education. This could eventually help harmonise efforts across Europe. The three pillars that are considered key for internationalisation strategies in Europe, but should still be customised within national frameworks, are:

- international student and staff mobility;
- the internationalisation and improvement of curricula and digital learning;
- and strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) analyses national approaches to internationalisation of higher education from a different angle. In its 2004 report "Trade in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges", four types of approaches are identified based on the rationales and motivations/needs driving different national strategies (OECD 2004, see Table 1). For each approach, a set of internationalisation tools can be identified. For example, efforts focusing on fee-paying international student recruitment point to the "revenue-generating approach", according to this classification. The introduction of government-funded scholarships for targeted fields of study represents most likely an interest in the skilled migration approach. The respective approaches are not mutually exclusive and typically can complement each other within one broader strategy, depending on the country's circumstances and priorities. The OECD

Table 1 Types of approaches to cross-border post-secondary education (OECD 2004)

I.	The mutual understanding approach encompasses political, cultural, academic and development aid goals
II.	The skilled migration approach
III.	The revenue-generating approach
IV.	The capacity building approach encourages the use of foreign post-secondary education, however delivered, as a quick way to build an emerging country's capacity.

Source OECD. 2004. Trade in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges

taxonomy is a simple and useful heuristic tool in analysing and understating various approaches to internationalisation as well as their links to other policy areas. It also indicates that combining several ways of looking at internationalisation strategies and their specific elements could possibly be a helpful guideline for the policy makers in Europe, including in Romania.

4 Cross-Country Comparison

The four countries included in the analysis, Poland, Estonia, Germany and Romania, represent different approaches and level of advancement in their internationalisation efforts on the system level. They are also different in the size of their higher education populations (student and staff). To give an indication regarding the sizes of the respective national higher education systems, Estonia had slightly less than 100,000 students in 2012, Poland had slightly less than 2 million, Germany had slightly more than 2 million, while Romania went below 1 million (it exceeded this number a few years ago, then student enrolment went down).

A series of tables organized thematically will be used below to summarize and help interpret the differences. The differences are indeed important and, quite remarkably, they become easily detectable at a simple visual inspection of the tables, even before detailing the substance of the situation in each country. The spread of choices and practices in different countries is quite significant as well, which is helpful for the policy reflection in countries like Romania, which has the chance to build a new approach basically from scratch.

4.1 Presence (or Lack) of a National Internationalisation Strategy. Key Elements of National Internationalisation Strategies or Key Practices/Activities

A synopsis regarding the **existence (or lack of) of national strategies and approaches**, and the key documents in which these strategies and approaches are elaborated is presented in Table 2, below, followed by a detailed discussion. Table 3 provides a summary of the **key elements of either strategies or practices** with regard to internationalisation in the countries analysed. Furthermore, Table 3 succinctly illustrates the **main targets** we have been able to identify in the national formal strategies or *de facto* national approaches to internationalisation.

When looking for the presence of a well-developed strategy on the national level, only Germany and Estonia satisfy this condition in our group of countries. Germany has a long history of internationalisation and international academic cooperation, and is one of the top destinations worldwide for international students; in 2011, 6 % of the total number of international students came to study in Germany

Table 2 System-level internationalisation strategies and approaches; main documents in which they are elaborated

Poland	Estonia	Germany	Romania
Lack of unified formal strategy at system level Bottom-up approaches coordinated by Rectors' Conference in cooperation with a non-governmental agency and, in some cases, local authorities Poland's Migration Policy (2012) - partially deals with status of international students, researchers, etc	Formal, well-articulated strategy, elaborated in a series of recent documents Internationalization Strategy 2006–2015; Agreement on Good Practice in Internationalization of Estonia's HEIs (Rectors' Conference, Ministry of Education & Research, Archimedes Foundation); Other documents: Estonian HE Strategy 2006–2015 Estonian Research, Development and Innovation Strategy 2007–2013	Numerous strategies in place since 1990s, well-articulated and coordinated, also across sectors and levels, based on and presented in formal documents *Latest:* DAAD Strategy 2020 (2013); Strategy of the Federal and Länder Ministers of Science for the Internationalisation of the Higher Education Institutions in Germany (2013); Strategy of the Federal Government for the Internationalization of Science and Research (2008)	Lack of unified formal strategy at system level; scattered reference in various documents. Existing practices driven mainly by European/Bologna processes and bilateral agreements. No nationally-driven approaches, except towards Moldova

(OECD 2013). Moreover, a recent research commissioned by the British Council ranked Germany as number one among 11 countries for its overall internationalisation-friendly national policy environment, taking into consideration factors such as openness, quality assurance, degree recognition, as well as access and equity (British Council 2011).

It is not a surprise for Germany to be the leader among the countries compared here since it is also one of the leaders globally. The prominent German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has been active and well-funded since the 1950s in promoting international academic cooperation, and in particular exchange of students and scholars. Germany has also had various internationalisation strategies already since the 1990s (see the Germany chapter by N. Rohde in Ferencz and Wächter 2012). The most recently developed national-level key strategic documents supporting internationalisation are: a joint **Strategy of the Federal and *Länder* Ministers of Science for the Internationalisation of the Higher Education Institutions in Germany** (2013), the **DAAD 2020 Strategy** (2013a, b), and **Strengthening Germany's Role in the Global Knowledge Society. Strategy of the Federal Government for the Internationalization of Science and Research** (2008).

Table 3 Synopsis of key elements of national internationalisation strategies, or key practices/activities

Poland	Estonia	Germany	Romania
Key activities:	Focus on attracting MA and PhD-level students; scholarships for international MA and PhD students	9 fields of action (second systematic phase according to Teichler 2007)	Participation in bilateral and multilateral agreements
Bottom-up, HEIs-driven efforts to recruit international students:		1. Strategic internationalisation of HEIs	
		2. Improving the legal framework for internationalisation	Special scholarship program for students from Moldova
Marketing campaign "Study in Poland" (43 HEIs participating) between 2005 and 2012: participation in international fairs; individual presentations of Polish universities abroad; joint web portal	Creation of a supportive legal environment;	3. Establishing a culture of welcome	
		4. Establishing an international campus	
	Internationalisation of teaching: programs in English.	5. Increasing international mobility of students	
		6. Enhancing Germany's attractiveness as a place to study	
Study in Warsaw, Study in Krakow initiatives, in cooperation with local authorities.	Development of a support system for internationalisation.	7. Attracting excellent (young) academics from abroad	
		8. Expanding international research cooperation	
		9. Establishing transnational courses	
Development of internationalisation strategies on individual HEI level		Other activities and strategic provisions: umbrella marketing campaigns ("Study in	

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Poland	Estonia	Germany	Romania
		Germany"; "Research in Germany") new Immigration Law since 2005 improvements in recognition of foreign degrees.	
HEIs use specially designed iPhone, and iPad apps to attract international students			
Targeting foreign students of Polish origin (with government scholarships)		DAAD 2020 strategy: Scholarships for the best Outward-looking structures (helping HEIs realize their strategies) - Promote expertise for scientific and academic cooperation	
Ukraine designated as a target country.			

Germany has a very well-elaborated, comprehensive strategy for internationalisation, coordinated across sectors and also across levels of policy making and implementation, as illustrated in Table 3 below (Germany's column is always the thickest in any of these tables!). The combined federal and state (Länder) strategy identifies nine concrete fields of action supporting internationalisation with joint policy goals for each field. The nine areas effectively combine priorities of all stakeholders, from individual higher education institutions to the German states (Länder), and up to the overarching national level. The fields of action range from very concrete ones (such as "strategic internationalisation of the individual HEIs"), to broader goals aiming at improvements of the legal structures to support internationalisation at the national and Länder levels, and to even broader national aims such development of a "culture of welcome". The DAAD's strategic priorities until 2020 work well with the system level fields of action and cover three main areas, such as merit-based scholarships; support for higher education institutions to help them realise their internationalisation strategies; and expert advice in the area of scientific and academic cooperation (DAAD 2013a, b).

Estonia is an interesting case as another country that actually does have a formal strategy for internationalisation of higher education at the national level since 2006, the **Estonian Higher Education Internationalisation Strategy 2006–2015** (*Study in Estonia* website). The strategy is complemented by **The Agreement on Good**

Practice in the Internationalisation of Estonia's Higher Education Institutions, which is a joint document signed by the Rectors' Conference, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Archimedes Foundation in 2007, focusing specifically on the issue of quality in internationalisation of higher education. Moreover, similar to Germany, the country has developed additional strategic documents such as the **Estonian Higher Education Strategy** also for the 2006–2015 period, and the **Estonian Research Development and Innovation Strategy** for 2007–2013.

The **Estonian Higher Education Internationalisation Strategy** clearly states its objectives, which are to make the system more competitive within the region, to make it more open by creating adequate legal and institutional tools, and to make Estonian higher education more visible internationally. The document is divided into three main strategic areas focusing on: (1) creating supportive legal frameworks; (2) internationalisation of teaching; and (3) support system for internationalisation overall. In addition, the voluntary **Agreement on Good Practice in the Internationalisation of Estonia's Higher Education Institutions** signed by rectors of public, private and professional institutions focuses on specific aspects relevant to international students but also for international academic staff. The **Agreement** touches upon many important subjects in the area of internationalisation, including the rights of international students, issues related to admissions, such as language requirements, as well as responsibilities and duties of the higher education institutions to ensure quality education for international students and also a suitable environment for international academic staff. For example, the **Agreement** specifies that: "(…) participating higher education institutions shall ensure that academic staff involved in the curricula and programmes taught in foreign languages have the necessary linguistic competence in those languages". Or that a "participating higher education institution shall support the adaptation of its international researchers and teaching staff to life in Estonia by facilitating their close interaction with its academic and support staff." (Agreement on Good Practice in the Internationalisation of Estonia's Higher Education Institutions). Some of the changes on the system level, as projected in the strategy, were driven by higher education institutions joining their forces. For example, universities were able to influence changes in the legislative environment, and at present graduating students are allowed to stay in Estonia for 6 months after finishing their studies to work, while previously they had to leave the country right away (ICEF Monitor 2013).

The overall internationalisation efforts in Estonia seem well-coordinated among different stakeholders (see Table 5, below), such as the government actors, and higher education institutions, with the help of the Archimedes Foundation, a non-governmental organization set up expressly to help implement government strategies and projects in national and international education and research. The Estonian approach is also a strategic one. For example, Estonia identified priority countries (top markets) for its internationalisation efforts and is targeting mostly: Finland, Russia, Latvia, Turkey, and China. The head of Archimedes Communications claims that it was not the just the Internationalisation Strategy but in fact the

branding and marketing campaign "Study in Estonia" launched in 2008 that really made a difference. (ICEF Monitor 2013).

Despite an OECD recommendation in 2007 or the recent EC recommendations, the higher education system in Poland operates still without a national strategy for internationalisation or a clearly formulated national level approach. Some provisions that apply to international students are included in policy documents about international migration (Poland's Migration Policy 2012). The absence of a national internationalisation strategy, however, does not mean that internationalisation is not important for individual higher education institutions in Poland (as indicated in Table 3, above). On the contrary, universities in collaboration with a non-governmental foundation (Perspektywy Foundation) and, in a very few cases, with local authorities, seem to be the main (and possibly only) driving forces behind the existing internationalisation efforts. Interestingly, the focus of their efforts is also on the international student recruitment (evoking a revenue-generating approach), which is supported by a "**Study in Poland**" initiative and marketing campaign coordinated by the Perspektywy Foundation. There are 43 universities participating in the "**Study in Poland**" initiative out of the over 450 institutions in total, including over 100 public higher education institutions. Recently presented achievements of the campaign for years 2005–2012 included participation in 55 international educational fairs, presence in 17 countries worldwide, and development of a joint web portal as well as newly added social media and other new IT tools such as applications for mobile phones to attract international students (Siwinski presentation at conference in Warsaw "Studenci zagraniczni 2013"on 17–18 January 2013). In addition, smaller branding and marketing initiatives of similar kind have emerged on regional levels and out of cooperation of regional governments with higher education institutions. For example, collaborative efforts of Cracow-based universities led to establishment of a "**Study in Krakow**" campaign (http://www.study-krakow.com/). Similar activities can be found in Lublin, which promotes itself with "**Study in Lublin**" campaign (http://study.lublin.eu/en/). Not surprisingly, there is also a "**Study in Warsaw**" campaign and apparently more are being developed in other cities.

The internationalisation approach and activities are fundamentally bottom-up in Poland. Which does not mean that they do not include strategic elements. For example, Ukraine has been designated as a priority target country and special local recruitment offices have been set up across Ukraine as part of the "Study in Poland" program (www.studyinpoland.pl).

Romania does not have a national internationalisation strategy, or any set of coordinated practices, neither top-down nor bottom up (Romania's columns in Tables 2 and 3 are almost empty!). This does not mean that internationalisation activities are completely missing. Where they exist, they are to a large extent a result of Romania's participation in bilateral or international agreements and programmes for student and staff mobility, such as the Erasmus or CEEPUS programmes. Romania also participates in European collaborative research programmes that also facilitate international mobility to some extent. In addition, Romania has a special program, run jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

Ministry of Education to support incoming students from neighbouring Moldova, motivated by cultural, economic, national and geopolitics rationales. Students from Moldova, who speak the same language, in fact represent half of the total "international" students in Romania. We have also noted a few individual efforts by individual universities to attract international fee paying students. They appear to have only very limited success.

We have seen in this section that both Germany and Estonia have strategies at national level for higher education as a whole, and then a separate, but coordinated strategy for internationalisation. Moreover, both countries have formal strategies at national level for research, with which the overall higher education strategy and internationalisation strategy are also coordinated. Even more, all these strategies (higher education, research, and internationalisation) are coordinated with the strategies for other sectors. Germany is actually a model-case, illustrating almost perfectly the ideal model projected by the EC and others, discussed in the first part of the article. Estonia is not far from this model either. It choices are more strategic (or focused, as mentioned earlier), and its strategic planning is more recent. It is also a much smaller population and HE system in comparison to Germany, which might partially explain the more focused strategic approach. Poland and Romania have none of these: neither internationalisation strategy, nor higher education or research strategy, which makes any comment about "coordination" intra-sectoral, or cross-sectoral, simply superfluous.

This situation might invite the question whether an internationalisation strategy for higher education, which is our subject, is at all possible without a more complex set strategic policy and planning process which would include higher education as a whole, research, and other areas and sectors (such migration, economic development, demographic policies) or, more generally, a sound and comprehensive strategic policy planning process at national level. Our study does not provide sufficient evidence to answer the question, but it does indicate that it is an important question to consider.

Another informative dimension of comparison among the four countries proves to be that of strategic targets in internationalisation of higher education, whether formal or informal. Findings from the comparison on this dimension contribute to further refining the conclusions about the four countries, in fact contribute to drawing ***individual country profiles*** with regard to internationalisation. Moreover, this comparison is informative in assessing both the ambitions and the potential for success in the four countries, although it does not provide a clear-cut answer to the question regarding "what works best". As illustrated in Table 4 (below), there are quite clear targets in Germany, Estonia, and Poland. Romania, on the other side, appears to place itself again in a special territory, with no targets of any kind, at least not for the time being.

It is surprising in a way that Poland is in the category "with targets", since it does not have a formal national tragedy for internationalisation. The target of increasing the number of foreign students in Poland to 100,000 or 5 % of the total student population by 2020 is an informal one, set by HEIs coordinating their internationalisation efforts, as explained above. What is remarkable in the case of Poland is

Table 4 Strategic targets in internationalisation: formal or informal

Poland	Estonia	Germany	Romania
Unofficial target: 100,000 incoming foreign students by 2020	Targets for 2015: increasing number of international students to the level of 2000, mostly on master and PhD level; increasing the number of Estonian students in exchange programs to the level of 2000; 3 % of permanent teaching staff positions are occupied by foreign professors; an opportunity for all Estonian PhD students to spend at least one semester in a foreign university; 10 % of foreigners among PhD students and post-doctoral students in Estonian universities	E.g.: at least 350,000 foreign students by 2020	No strategy – no stated targets, except those resulting from international commitments (E.g. as part of Europe 2020 Strategy)
Or 5 % of total student population by 2020			

that the bottom-up, non-government driven mobilisation in internationalisation is quite significant, and although in a way "spontaneous", it is not disorganized or chaotic: these activities benefit from strategic choices made by participating institutions, and are also oriented by clear, although informal targets. We present this characteristic as an important "statement of facts". The question whether or not this "model" is effective, whether it works, remains to be answered.

Estonia's "targets" column appears remarkably precise and also "strategic" (clear and well-reflected upon choices), following directly from the focused nature of the overall internationalisation strategy. It is also quite ambitious, speaking for example of the objective of having 3 % of permanent teaching staff positions occupied by foreign professors by 2015, or reaching a threshold of 10 % foreigners at doctoral and post-doctoral level.

As expected, Germany has an elaborated set of targets, some of which are already apparent in Tables 2 and 3 above. We have chosen not to list all of them (which make the German column artificially thin this time, a very detailed presentation of targets in the area of student mobility is provided in the Ferencz and Wächter 2012, in the chapter dedicated to Germany), but rather illustrate the scope of German ambitions in internationalisation with one example. The number of foreign students is planned to rise to about 350,000 by 2020, an increase of about 40 % compared with 2011 (over 250,000 international students, see Table 6).

Table 5 Key actors in national internationalisation strategy/practices

Poland	Estonia	Germany	Romania
Perspektywy Foundation; Polish Rectors' Conference (43 HEIs participating in Study in Poland initiative)	Ministry of Education and Research; Rectors Conference; Archimedes Foundation	DAAD; Federal Foreign Office; Federal Ministry of Education and Science; the Länder; German Research Foundation; Humboldt Foundation, German Rectors' Conference (HRK)	Ministry of Education, National Agency of Study Scholarships and Loans (Agentia de Credite si Burse de Studii); Other ministries and agencies implementing international agreements

4.2 Key Actors in Internationalisation Strategies and Practices

We summarize in Table 5 (below) the situation with regard to the key actors in the four countries considered for the study. For the case of Germany and Estonia, as already mentioned above, we see a strong and coordinated presence of government actors. In Germany, the policy landscape is both very complex (both the federal government and the Länder have important prerogatives in higher education), and it also appears to be very mature and all coordinated. Special government agencies, such as DAAD and the German Research Foundation are very important, in fact they can be responsible in large part for "making a difference". We also note the active participation of the German Rectors' Conference. In terms of actors, the German model appears to be largely "governmental". We have not been able to clarify the extent to which non-governmental actors play a role, but they certainly exist (like the Humboldt Foundation). Most often, however, they appear to work in cooperation and even with the support of the government.

Estonia also appears to illustrate a governmental model, with the participations of HEIs' leaders (Rectors Conference). It is interesting to note the role of an intermediary organization, the Archimedes Foundation, which appears to have government support but benefits from the operational flexibility of an NGO. This model of some kind of "intermediary organizations" dedicated to supporting internationalisation strategy and efforts, is worth taking into account in countries like Romania, that consider now adopting internationalisation policies and building adequate support structures.

Poland is also an interesting case. The government is almost virtually absent but HEIs are mobilizing and developing their own institutional internationalisation strategies and working together to create a national strategic framework, as well as tools and instruments to support their needs and ambitions. Like in Estonia, we note the positive role of a NGO created with the specific purpose to assist HEIs, including, in this case, but not limited to, internationalisation. Unlike Estonia, this

NGO appears to operate fully independently from the government with the support of member HEIs. The Polish case provides some support for the idea that, while the absence of government involvement may result in serious difficulties for any major internationalisation efforts, HEIs can organize themselves and find alternative partners to get things started, at least, and to reach a certain degree of success, rather that resigning themselves to inaction or to only following the often uncertain push-and-pull of international commitments made by the respective government that might have an impact on internationalisation.

The Romanian situation has already been explained, there are no key actors since there is no national strategy and no consistent national practices, except for those resulting from bilateral and international agreements (administered by ministries and state agencies). What is however important to note is the complete absence from the picture of the Romanian Rectors' Council. Of all four countries, Romania is the only one in which the organization of the leaders of HEIs play no role. In the context of our analysis in the present study, it appears that activating this organization is a good place to start, if not finding an alternative to it.

4.3 Student Mobility Flows

How can we try to answer the question "what works" and ("what doesn't")? what are good strategies, and good practices, in reality, beyond formal and normative models? The nature of our study does not allow providing any comprehensive, or even partial but definite, answer. Theoretically, one possible research strategy would be to look into student mobility fluxes and try to understand what is the differential impact of definite strategies and practices. Table 6 below provide data about student fluxes in the four countries, again insufficient for a decisive analysis. What we can see, however, is that Germany (with a comprehensive strategy and string support system) has the most international students. This is true not only in absolute numbers, as Germany stands out strikingly in terms of percentage of international students – well over 10 %, as opposed to about 2 or less than 2 % in the other cases. Romania (lacking a national internationalisation strategy) has about the same percentage of international students as Estonia (with a well elaborated nationals strategy), and more than Poland (with significant bottom-up efforts and an informal strategy). Is this an indication that a national strategy doesn't necessarily make a difference? Difficult to say. We need to note that one country (Moldova) contribute half of Romania's number of international students, and students from Moldova are not exactly "international students". The numbers would be a lot worse if Moldova were factored out. Also, Romania has the lowest share of international students in the EU, in percentage terms, and the trend is decreasing numbers (UEFSCDI 2013). These facts, in turn, may speak for the need of a national strategy, or at least for the need of active and well articulated efforts at national level. The number of Romanian students studying aboard, on the other side, is increasing, and Romania is already a net exporter of students. If we consider

the overall demographic trends in Romania, that is a decreasing population (overall student enrolment is already affected by these trends), the incapacity to attract significant number of international students may appear as an additional bad news. It is a fact that Romania used to be very attractive for international students during the communist times, although how to interpret this fact is not unambiguous. Perhaps this fact, however, is an indication of Romania's greater potential than its present performance. Certain areas, such as medicine (see Table 6, again) appear to have particularly promising potential. But as mentioned at the beginning of the study, internationalisation should not be conceived as being only about attracting (paying) international students. A good strategy for Romania should identify and consider other relevant factors and motivations as well.

Table 6 Student mobility flows data

	Poland	Estonia	Germany	Romania
Percent of students enrolled abroad (2010–2012)	2.2 %	7.7 %	4.8 %	2.6 % Increasing trend; net exporter
Incoming foreign students (% of total student population, 2010–2012)	1.39 % 24,253 53 % from neighbouring countries (mostly Ukraine, Belarus, also Norway, Sweden, Spain) 13 % increase in 2012 compared to 2012; 100 % from 2005/6 One of lowest % in OECD	2.1 % 1,900 74 % from neighbouring countries: Finland, Latvia, the Russian Federation or Sweden	11.5 % over 250,000 (13 % China, 7 % Turkey, 5 % Russia) 2000: 175,000; 2011: over 250,000, making Germany the fourth most popular study destination worldwide.	1.98 % 19,308 (1.3 % in 07/08 Moldova 50 %, Tunisia 6.3 %, Greece 5 %, Israel 4.6 %) Diminishing numbers and %; lowest shares in EU
Most popular programs among foreign students	Medicine (including dentist schools), Management, Economics, International Relations, Philology, Tourism			35 % medical and paramedical studies in 2007

Data sources: Ferencz and Wächter 2007—chapters on Germany and Romania; DAAD 2013a, b), UEFSCDI (2013). OECD (2013), Perspektywy Foundation (2013) and Archimedes Foundation (2013) for Poland and Estonia

4.4 Resources

One last comparative zoom-in in this analysis is about resources mobilized in the respective countries in relation to their internationalisation strategies and activities.

In Estonia, separate funds are made available to support its internationalisation efforts, specifically the Doctoral Studies and Internationalisation Programme (DoRa) coordinated by the Archimedes Foundation, and they have grown since 2008, amounting to approximately EUR 32 million for the period 2008–2015 (http://www.kslll.net/PoliciesAndAchievements/ExampleDetails.cfm?id=131#). Like the other countries in this group, Estonia can also benefit from European funds in this area. The overall budget for DoRa programme comprises contributions allocated by the Ministry of Education and Research, 73 % coming from the European Union Social Fund and 9 % from the Estonian government as well as 18 % share of the budget supported by individual HEIs participating in the programme (http://www.mapping-he.eu/Programmes/ProgramDetails.aspx?countryid=8&sm=1&programid=P149).

The budget for this programme in 2008 was EUR 25,000 and it supported 400 grantees. In 2011, the budget reached over EUR 6.5 million and the number of grantees was 1200. (ibid). As part of the programme, Estonia offers scholarships for international students, mostly for PhD studies in a set of six fields of study including areas such as biotechnology, health, materials technology among others.

All of the strategies outlined in Germany are not only comprehensive and well-developed but they are also supported by significant resources. The DAAD's budget alone in 2011 was nearly EUR 400 million, with 45 % funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 % by the Federal Ministry of Education, and nearly 14 % by the EU (DAAD: http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/daad_funding_instruments_usa_germany.pdf).

Germany is unique in its approach to international students as it does not allow for charging higher tuition fees to international students, which is a common trend in the rest of Europe (British Council 2011). Overall, Germany seems to focus mostly on both the mutual understanding and on the skilled migration approaches based on the OECD typology.

Poland and Romania allocate resources from the national budgets for international student scholarships, but mainly for co-nationals from other countries, or for special target countries with particular historical, cultural, and ethnic ties (such as Moldova, in the case of Romania). In addition, in Poland, the HEIs participating in the "Study in Poland" programme, pay a fixed annual fee. In the academic year 2012–2013, the fee to participate in the programme and all of its aspects for an institution with over 15,000 students was roughly EUR 4,300 + VAT (18,000 PLN + VAT) (http://www.studyinpoland.pl/konsorcjum/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2580&Itemid=4).

Both countries participate in the European mobility programs, benefiting from European funding. Universities in both countries have an unmistakable interest in fee paying international students. A study realized in Romania (UEFSCDI 2013)

indicated not only that a national strategy and support infrastructure is missing, but universities have to face significant bureaucratic hurdles (approval from the central national authorities is needed) even when they recruit potential fee paying students through their own efforts.

5 Conclusions: Lessons from a Comparison

The comparison among the four countries was invited by the Romanian Executive Agency for Funding of Higher Education, Innovation and Development. The selection of countries was in a way arbitrary, reflecting the interests of the Agency. Still, the comparison appears to be quite informative, even to a surprising degree.

We have been able to identify four country profiles, with some overlapping elements. Also, we have been able to identify models, facts, and questions that would be useful to consider when Romanian stakeholders deliberate about the opportunity (necessity?) of a national approach (if not strategy) to internationalisation of higher education, about conceptual and operational aspects related to such a future approach or strategy.

In terms of **country profiles**, we propose the following summary:

- **Germany** offers an example that is close to a kind of ideal normative model, promoted by the EC and by other authoritative international actors. This model includes: a comprehensive strategy not limited to recruitment of international students, formalized in a series of public documents. Non-governmental actors are present, but governmental actors (both national and region level) are in the driving seat, assuming responsibility for internationalisation strategy and practices, providing direction, resources, policy and administrative support; the strategy is well coordinated within the sector and across sectors; it is coordinated across several layers of policy making and implementation; higher education institutions play a major role, not individually, but through the Rectors' Conference. Finally, this **model appears to work** (whether it can be exported as such, is a question). It allows to meet major objectives of national, state, and sectoral relevance, including relevance for higher education.
- **Estonia** is an example of a small country committed to developing and implementing a formal, well-articulated strategy, adapted to national conditions; this strategy is focused, rather than all-encompassing (like in Germany), it involves narrower "strategic choices"; the strategy is also coordinated within the sector and with other sectors, and among the relevant policy layers and actors; coordination among actors involves not only technical or strategic matters, but also ethic aspects in internationalisation (a local innovation); universities participate and play a key role through the Rectors Conference; as another local innovation, a flexible organisation was created specifically to support internationalisation efforts in Estonia, which combines state support, with NGO operational flexibility. It is still early to say whether this model works, or at least we have not been

able to access data that would allow an evaluation, which would be a very important exercise, as the model seems to be very promising. Many of its elements appear to be "transportable" to other countries, but any immediate import should be considered with care, in particular in the absence of impact evaluation.

- **Poland** is yet a different example, a different country profile. Internationalisation efforts are bottom-up, initiated by HEIs; they have even developed a kind of informal strategy; government authorities are largely absent, and their absence does not seem to help universities in their efforts; universities coming together created new instruments; a special structure was created, a foundation, similar but not identical with that from Estonia, as it appears to be a genuine non-governmental initiative and operation in Poland; universities have been able to identify alternative partners (local authorities). There is no proper assessment of this "model" either. On the positive side, the Polish example shows that universities can act whether the government is absent, and with some good results. What is unclear is whether the significant non-participation of the government is an insurmountable obstacle or not.
- **Romania** has a limited record of activities in internationalisation; it lacks a national strategy and significant practices, except for "following", based on international agreements and except for the special relationship with Moldova; the advantage is that, starting almost form zero, it has a chance to "get it right" quickly.

It is difficult to find arguments against the development of a national internationalisation strategy for Romania. Rather, the real question is how to develop and implement one. This "question" comprises in fact several "questions". The present study offers certain suggestions regarding what these exact questions might be, and how to approach them. For example:

- Is it an option not to have a national internationalisation strategy? Yes, but it will probably come at a cost. Also, coordination at national level seems required anyway. In absence of an active involvement of the government in this regard, an alternative agent seems to be needed to coordinate efforts on the national level – for example a non-governmental organisation, active Rectors' Conference, or a university association.
- Is it the case that government has the key responsibility in internationalisation? Probably yes, and it must assume it.
- If governmental inaction persists, is it possible to overcome such a situation? Possibly, but very hard to accomplish, through a mobilisation of universities and alternative partners. Universities must activate themselves in any case. Action by the Romanian Rectors Council is a must in any case.
- How to decide on priorities? There are some good examples in Europe (and there must be some domestic expertise available as well).
- Is there any one-model that Romania could just import and put in practice as such? Most likely no, but there are good lessons to be learn from selective other exercises. For example, there is clear merit in cross-sectoral coordination of an internationalisation strategy.

- How detailed should such a strategy be? Should it go to the level of detail as in Estonia indicating specific fields of study that are more 'desired' and specific 'target countries', or being too top-down would not allow enough flexibility for the institutional implementation? We believe a Romanian strategy could build on some of the existing individual HEIs efforts to date, and effectively combine broader national goals with elements that are more attractive for individual institutions, to ensure effective implementation. It might not be possible to opt out from the revenue-generating approach, but it should not be the exclusive focus for the long run.

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Erratum to: Why Do Romanian Universities Fail to Internalize Quality Assurance?

Koen Geven, Adina Maricuţ, Norbert Sabic, Robert Santa and Oana Sârbu

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Koen Geven, Adina Maricuţ, Norbert Sabic, Robert Santa and Oana Sârbu

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K. Geven (✉)
European University Institute, Florence, Italy
e-mail: koen.geven@eui.eu

A. Maricuţ · N. Sabic
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
e-mail: maricut_adina@ceu-budapest.edu

N. Sabic
e-mail: norbert.sabic@gmail.com

R. Santa
Institute of Education, London, England
e-mail: robi.santa@gmail.com

O. Sârbu
ARACIS, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: oana.sarbu@aracis.ro

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