

Chapter 8

New and Pressing Challenges for Romanian Higher Education System after 10 Years of Bologna Values Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines a number of issues related to the implementation of reforms in Romania, which focused on the national higher education system in order to internalize the values of the Bologna Process. It presumes that the assumption process of the challenges linked to the educational effects of the globalization and regionalization phenomena must be preceded by solving dilemmas, eliminating conceptual, regulatory, and instrumental fetishes, and changing the behavior of stakeholders involved. The study shows that after 10 years of the Bologna Process implementation, the balance between tradition and modernity is still ambiguous, many areas of uncertainty are kept, being unclear how to place this process within the European economic integration logic, and that much of the expected benefits cannot be seen. This chapter explores the extent to which changes that have occurred in the Romanian higher education system and the tools used for this purpose, strategic or circumstantial.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the pressing endeavors towards redesigning educational landscape, according to the assumed challenges derived from the new logics of globalization and from the technical-economic paradigm shift, it becomes a sign of normality to focus our scientific attention on the binary relationship between tradition and change

both at an institutional level and in terms of regulations. From a theoretical point of view, tradition is based on “a rich practice articulated in time” (Feyerabend, 1978), and tradition as far as higher education is concerned is a very generous one which entailed accumulations, interactions and qualitative leaps. One of the most frequently asked questions refers to the phrases which must be used correctly when we speak about higher education.

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In the context of the growing internationalization, marketization and massification of education is it advisable to use the singular form (higher education) or the plural one (higher education(s))? The answer to this question must be sought in the dynamic space of globalization which rewrites the balance between homogeneity and diversity. The globalization of education is a process depending on numerous factors both internal and external. As Margison (2006) stated “*globalization is inside higher education as well as outside*” which makes us reconsider opinions about some pairs of terms such as: adequate vs. inadequate, modern vs. archaic, efficient vs. inefficient. Higher education systems are spaces of dynamism and interdependence. The thing which should concern those who elaborate and implement strategies and policies of tertiary education is whether the anticipated dynamism is a manageable and beneficial one and whether the interdependencies inside and outside the system generate convergence or entropy at its level. The meaningful results of the Romanian higher education are notable and can be used as a starting point for changes necessary at certain stages. On the other side of the previously mentioned binary relationship, the one related to the change in paradigm, it is said that revolutionary modifications occur when “*scientists understand and accept that the paradigm postulated by them cannot adequately explain the world to which it refers*” (Kuhn, 1970:63).

BACKGROUND

Depicting the manner in which tradition accords with the need for reform in the Romanian education is a complex endeavor, both provocative and useful. Besides the motivated criticism regarding the quality and efficiency of tertiary education in Romania and the vulnerability of institutions and higher education programs, we must point out that the Romanian higher education also capitalizes on a series of competitive advantages, some of them sustainable, which may become profitable

only when their conditions are understood and when actions are taken in the respective direction. Making higher education an active agent of the Romanian economic and social modernization depends solely on understanding and accepting the change in the dominant logics happening in the international and the European academic space. Globalization and regionalization are normal, dynamic, necessary, useful but not inevitable processes which should not be considered matter-of-course and unchangeable. The design of these processes depends essentially on the way in which the social actors understand them, assess their efficiency and get involved in their dynamics. We need to be mainly concerned by the position in which we have to place the university in the process of modernization happening in education, especially now, when higher education is maybe the most globalized component of the social landscape. Enders et. al. (2004) stated that “*although many universities still seem to perceive themselves rather as objects of processes of globalization, they are at the same time also key agents*”. This truism is the more probable in the case of a country which is on a complex and painful path of transition from a social-political system to another, and which greatly needs to use its education system as a modern vector of change at the level of the dominant social logics. The people who make decisions about public policies related to higher education must not forget that in order for these policies to have consistency they need to internalize good practice, to be based on successful experiences and to be characterized by a dynamic continuity. The greatest attention must be paid to avoiding terminological fetishes and errors of interpretation of certain concepts and taken actions. An area where confusions are frequent regarding the meaning of some terms and the actions required by them is the one referring to globalization and the internationalization of higher education respectively. There is a large specialized literature concerning these concepts. Luijten-Lub et al. (2005) suggest that,

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