

Chapter 9

The Role of Academic Values in Higher Education Convergence in Romania: A New Approach

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ABSTRACT

The Bologna process set forth a transformation among institutions of higher education in Europe to increase student and staff mobility and to make the European Union more competitive in the world education market. Years of a centrally planned system, isolation from the international conversations, and developments of higher education values made the implementation of the Bologna process in Romania a difficult and controversial one. This chapter introduces a concept from the marketing literature regarding brand globalization that recognizes and supports an integral part of the Bologna process – that of academic values. Moreover, the discussion presents findings from an empirical study regarding leadership aspects in Romanian higher education. Recommendations are then provided as to the implementation of those values in Romania's higher education system.

INTRODUCTION

In 1999 the Bologna process moved the European Union from not only a cluster of nations with free trade and common currency but helped establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). With over 4,000 institutions, 17 million students and 1.5 million staff in the EHEA, many of the

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key directives set by the Bologna process and subsequent meetings have been addressed such as the establishment of three cycles of education including Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate's, quality assurance of educational programs, and a system of transferable credits to any EU institution (Commission of the European Communities, 2006; Roman, 2008).

The importance of the EHEA cannot be minimized. As the EU converges on other issues the Bologna process helped solidify the need for convergence of higher education institutions within Europe as a means of attracting students from a global marketplace (Commission of the European Communities, 2006) while enhancing student and staff mobility. However, in developing the foundation for convergence the issue of commodification led to the recognition that higher education is a social institution serving the public good and not a product of trade (Miklavic, 2012). Hence, in the Berlin Declaration (2003), the term academic values was introduced as a critical component in the convergence of a single European Higher Education Area as a means of embracing the diversity in language, culture and educational systems prevalent throughout Europe.

Specifically, academic values at institutional level support university autonomy and democratic policies among institutions of higher education while at individual level they are about academic freedom and equal opportunity. In many instances, implementing the Bologna process in such a diverse higher education landscape as Europe has while embracing academic values is challenging. However, for former Eastern European countries the process is even more cumbersome and will require a new model for transitioning given the role of higher education under their former regimes.

In many of the former communist countries the role of the university was to support the state in meeting the needs of the labor market. Circumstances surrounding higher education in these countries were complex as in the case of East Germany's convergence during unification. In the former GDR (Schonewille, 1998), all aspects of higher education were centrally planned and included contents of courses and examination standards with financial resources based on student output. It was thought that education could be technically planned and controlled centrally; however, the type and amount of an individual's education granted by the state mirrored the as-

sumed collective political economic needs of society (Baker, Kohler, & Stock, 2007). Education was not seen as an individual rite but a mandate by the state. With emphasis on science and math, higher education became rigid and the ability to meet changing student needs and experiment with different methodologies was nonexistent. Higher education and its resources were limited to teaching with research directed to specific areas of need by the state. Ultimately, the state security agencies (Stasi) created an environment plagued by insubordination and conformity in education and the social sciences and, along with censorship of publications, universities were reduced to solely matriculating engineers and scientists to work for the benefit of the state (Straube, 1996).

THE CASE OF ROMANIA

In the second half of the 19th century, Romanian institutions of higher education were modeled after the French system of specialized institutions and professional schools; however, during Communism, the Soviet model of a centralized system of education prevailed and linked education to the needs of the planned economy focusing on engineering and agricultural fields (Pierson & Odsliu, 2012). During that time the Party exercised ideological control in hiring academics and granting promotions (Damian, 2011). Teachers obtained promotions through continuing education as it was the only way to increase their salaries. Research was applied and limited to those areas needed by the state such as technology and engineering. The government approved text books in schools but allowed for diversity in pedagogical methods. As well, the government introduced national exams and standardized qualifications for entrance into universities. However, as a result of this central planning, with the exception of a brief period of liberalization of the Romanian society of the early '70s (Pilon, 1992), the country faced a dearth of experts in many subject areas mainly in social

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