

Chapter 12

Convergence and Internationalization of Higher Education in Europe: The Case of Romania

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ABSTRACT

This chapter approaches the internationalization of higher education in Europe in terms of its relationship with convergence trends in European higher education. It starts with illustrating a relationship of mutual influence between convergence and internationalization at a conceptual level. The chapter looks at developments of European higher education over the past two decades, including the Bologna process, as triggers for increased harmonization of the European higher education systems. Among others, the internationalization of higher education is a way forward in implementing the Bologna process. These aspects are illustrated on a national example: Romania, through the influences of European, national, and institutional developments on the internationalization of higher education. The analysis at institutional level comprises a review conducted for all the 92 accredited universities from Romania, public and private. The study searches the information available on universities' Websites in relation with their internationalization processes. The chapter ends with the discussion of the internationalization process as a trigger and as a way forward for increased convergence in European higher education from multiple perspectives that are applied to Romania: conceptual and applied, European, national and institutional, and strategic and operational.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter approaches the internationalization of higher education in Europe in terms of its relationship with convergence trends in European

higher education. The connection is manifested at regional, national and institutional levels and the discussion is conducted through the example of Romania. The chapter starts with a conceptually directed discussion of the relationship between

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convergence and internationalization in European higher education, illustrating a relationship of mutual influence. Then, it looks at developments over the past two decades as a main source of convergence in European higher education. The Bologna process has been the trigger for increased harmonization of the European higher education systems and enhanced internationalization of higher education through mobility, that was one of the reasons for launching the Bologna process in the first place. Internationalization of higher education is also a way forward in implementing the Bologna process and developing further the European Higher Education Area.

The third section takes into discussion Romania as a national example and illustrates the influence of European, national and institutional developments on the internationalization process. At European level Romania adhered to most policies established through the Bologna process and connected activities. At national level the internationalization process has taken place and has intensified in the past years despite the lack of coordination through a national internationalization strategy. Generally, the levels of different forms of higher education internationalization are low in Romania as compared to the other European countries and to European averages. At institutional level actions are rather reactive than proactive, as many Romanian universities pursue international activities without having a strategic vision. A review conducted for all the 92 accredited higher education institutions in Romania, public and private, will be presented, by making an analysis of the information available on universities' websites in relationship with their internationalization.

The last section discusses the internationalization process as a trigger and as a way forward for increased convergence in European higher education from multiple perspectives. The issue is looked at from different angles and perspectives: conceptual and applied, European, national and institutional, strategic and operational. These

perspectives of internationalization and convergence are discussed for the case of Romanian higher education.

The chapter concludes that there is a close relationship between internationalization and convergence of higher education in Europe. Such relationship occurs through educational policies as well as through concrete implementation actions. Countries are at different levels of internationalization of their higher education and one interesting question recommended for further research relates to identifying the beneficiaries, the means and the extent to which they benefit from an increased convergence of the European higher education.

CONVERGENCE AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE: HOW DO THEY RELATE?

The discussion starts by looking at the relationship between convergence and internationalization for the European higher education and continues by discussing how this relationship has evolved over time. To start with, the concepts will be defined. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, convergence represents the act of converging and especially moving toward union or uniformity. In other words, convergence refers to integration and harmony.

In the case of higher education, convergence is seen as the harmonization of educational systems by pursuing the goal of and by establishing guidelines to be used internationally in respect of various aspects of the higher education life (quality, qualifications, and study organization). Internationalization of higher education refers to "a process of integrating an international and cultural dimension into the teaching, research and service function of an institution" (Knight, 2008, p. 19) and needs to be constantly scrutinised, as the same author emphasizes:

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