

Chapter 20

Convergence of Internationalization Paths in Romanian Universities: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter approaches the topic of convergence in European higher education with a focus on the international dimension of universities, as it was claimed and debated in the last years. The main goal is to analyze from three main directions the following aspects of internationalization: measures, indicators, barriers, and bodies responsible for international dimensions. These are highlighted by the results of a qualitative research performed among educational experts from Romanian Higher Education Institutions. The main facets of convergence of internationalization paths in Romanian universities are addressed, the indicators proposed are analyzed, and proposals for their improvement result from respondents' answers.

INTRODUCTION

The transition to the new knowledge economy calls for major paradigm shifts also within the academic environment. In the last two decades universities worldwide have been subjected to increasing pressure in order to adapt to the dynamics of the external environment. They had to change the perception of them as being “ivory towers” whose mission was mainly to create intrinsic and universal knowledge and start to actively involve in economic, social and political issues at national

and international level. In order to survive in the new socio-economic context universities have to rethink and accordingly reconfigure their vision, mission and strategies, to become more competitive and to enhance their adaptability to a highly dynamic external environment. These changes should be analyzed in terms of research and teaching activities, as well as managerial and administrative actions (Bartell, 2003).

Along with the ongoing globalization process, many authors share the opinion that one of the main ways to increase the resilience and adapt-

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ability capacity of universities in accordance with the signals coming from external environment and thus to increase the competitiveness of the university on a more and more globalized market of educational services consists in accelerating the *internationalization of universities* (Bartell, 2003; Marsella 2001; Sporn, 1999).

Within the debate of Bologna reforms and development of European Higher Education Area the topic of convergence represents a central issue. Dunkel (2009) states that Bologna Process was originally intended as a unifying blueprint for universities, which has subsequently transformed into a source of diverse reforms and results, which rather led to divergence. He considers that structural convergence is aimed, but the outcomes are located in the field of tension between convergence and diversity. "The conflicting targets of the Bologna process could lead to a clash between the trends towards a unitary concept on the one hand and national traditions on the other. What is important here is to strike a balance between convergence and diversity so as to facilitate mobility and safeguard the diversity of European traditions"(p.189). This could become possible by reaching convergence also in national educational policies. Other authors are sharing the same skeptical opinion related to the convergence reached within Bologna Process. They consider that in a next phase the focus should switch from a rather ideological and conceptual perspective to national and European policies targeted to emphasize convergence (Van Damme, 2009; Witte, 2007). The clash between convergence and institutional diversity should come to an end: systematical and structural convergence and transparency could rather foster and place in a favorable light institutional diversification.

Convergence can be approached from different perspectives: quality assurance, financing methods, educational policies at national level, internationalization etc. The present paper analyzes convergence of internationalization paths in Romanian universities by means of a qualita-

tive research presented bellow. Convergence of international dimensions cannot be analyzed independently, as internationalization is not a goal by itself, but rather a mean to achieve the major objectives of Bologna. Therefore, interference with connected areas can be identified in the items depicted next.

One of the main challenges regarding convergence issue is represented by developing proper indicators for its assessment. This paper aims -besides identifying the measures, barrier and responsible bodies for internationalization of Romanian universities- at developing a set of indicators able to measure the convergence of internationalization. A first attempt to develop these indicators for convergence assessment was conducted in Romanian universities at the end of 2012.

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Internationalization of higher education became a topic of interest among European universities in the early '90s (Teichler, 2004) and still has not lost its timeliness. Evidence for this is the still fervent debate on the Bologna Process, which entered a new phase of development since the official launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in March 2010.

The internationalizing concept can be analyzed from various perspectives, some of them being even divergent. Trying to delimitate and systematize the phenomenon of "internationalization of higher education institutions" (Margison & van der Wende, 2009; van der Wende, 2010) there are identified two distinct directions:

- The tendency to increase visibility on international level, joint programs with cross border partners, mobility for students, teachers and researchers, joint degree programs, joint research projects, foreign

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