
CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING THE REORGANIZATION OF A UNIVERSITY: LUCIAN BLAGA UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU

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Abstract:

The world is in crisis. The academic system, its core, too. It has to reorganise, to reform itself. Several steps were taken by developed countries but also the emerging ones or the new comers. In Romania, a new Education Law has settled a deep reform for universities. Observing the academic autonomy, each university has to find its new way according to the principles of the Education Law. Our case study refers on a middle seize university of regional vocation. The paper investigate the main factors to be considered on general context, national context and the university's one in the process of reforming and restructuring the university.

Keywords: academic reform, universities' ranking, reorganization of universities

The current paper is a case study in which we explore the elements which Lucian Blaga University should take into account in its process of reorganization which takes place as a result of the entrance in effect of Law 1/2011 of National Education. The process is a mandatory one for all Romanian universities, given the change within the financing system foreseen in the new law, especially with the new classification into three categories. Moreover, after 20 years of growth, the University is at a crossroads and must pass from the extensive and accelerated development towards stability, both within its structures and especially its teaching staff. So, we believe that the collective charged with the elaboration of a reorganization program must take into account:

1. General context

Mankind made its passage from 2-4 billion people by passing from its biotechnology and microelectronics oriented productive system, with the start of the „Helsinki” process and the promotion of democratic systems. These processes lead to a bipolar world in which some have plenty of resources and must manage their sharing, whilst others are in lack of resources, which must be found and allocated.

Today mankind is prepared to grow between 7-9 billion people. The lack of resources of which we speak today is relative, as was within the 7th decade. It has become obvious that one of the adequate means for this transition process is the „knowledge society”, which includes a superior accumulation of knowledge based on an increased sunk capital, but also on a minimal level of education which should transform the individual in the main production, repartition consumption and stability factor of living. Moreover, mankind switched from the global society to the interconnected society (the hypersensitive butterfly effect).

It is in this context that universities, in spite of their relative conservatorism, must transform (adaptation is not enough!) or to vanish. The current perception is that the current learning system, within its formative space the academic environment, is the main mean of success of this element (knowledge society).

“Nearly one third of the world’s population (29.3%) is under 15. Today there are 165 million people enrolled in tertiary education (ISCED – UNESCO). Projections suggest that that participation will peak at 263 million (British Council projection) in 2025.

This has as a consequence

*Accommodating the additional 98 million students would require more than **four major universities** (30,000 students) to open every week for the next fifteen years (Sir John Daniel 2009).*

The problem is that academic resources are, in some areas of the world, while the people who need training, in other places. As well as the means for sustaining the needs of this process.

Two phenomena have developed in the last two years: student mobility and teaching staff mobility, as well as the proliferation of ranking systems.

The developing and increase of the mobility of members of the academic communities as a support phenomena of the adaptation of mankind to these new condition almost lead to the finalization of the „interconnectivity” stage within the academic environment. This phenomenon is obvious within communities and developed and developing countries, as well as in countries with insufficient resources. The results obtained by revolutionizing the mobility of the academic world have revealed a possible solution to diminish or balance the lack of equilibrium „resource gathering / decrease of the population” within developed countries as compared to „lack of resources / excessive young population” within underdeveloped countries or emerging economies.

Ranking theory and practice has passed from attempts to answer the dilemma of „how to gather apples with pears, meaning the Nobel prize with the Golden Olympics or the Pulitzer prize” to the evaluation of solutions adapted to the new societies.

And with regard to UNESCO conferences or those organized by various EU structures, but mostly within IREG working papers, theoretical researches are focused on practical solutions concerning „interconnected” systems of evaluation and selection

for the main actors of the academic world: the university itself, the students and employers / financiers.

The process is huge given the fact that as we define the University today, as related to the world, according to UNESCO evaluation, there are between 17 and 70 thousand academic communities. This is why the publication of „the top 50,100, 500 etc.” does not have a practical relevance, because the „body” of the system is at a median level where most of the total allocated resources are consumed and valued.

The University is obliged to continuously analyze the environment, because of its dynamics, to develop its capabilities to ensure resources with their limitations, either geographically, either from a quality / quantity perspective. Students have won the freedom to choose the geographic location and the field, but in the likelihood of rougher and rougher available resources and a personal capacity which is more and more precisely evaluated. The actions of the public funders, are more and more measured both at the political level as well as at an administrative level, and must convince that allocations made will be more and more efficient. Employers have the means to precisely measure the investment and the risk of choosing graduates.

In this forming world LBUS must change its philosophy, must transform in an organism with a high entropy, capable of a quick and swift reorganization, a mobile structure which is always adapted to acting in a stressful and risky environment.

2. The national context

Romanian society also feels the new transformation of the world. Romania was also „interconnected” through globalization. The social, administrative and political environments which developed in Romania after 1989 had major leadership issues, on one hand due to the lack of legitimacy, on the other hand because of the lack of recycling of their own components. These gathered in the last 20 years (and not only that time span). They inherited and developed the defect of isolation, of their inability to communicate in a broader fashion and integration in deciding global structures. The price we pay for dialog through „interconnectivity” and a belonging to global structures is, due to that cause, over-dimensioned. Romanian society is governed by an asymmetric behaviour.

And the academic system is a part of society and has its qualities and shortcomings. The dialogue of the academic world, of university structures which activate in Romania is mostly a monologue even if there is a distinction between the speech of state and private systems. Informational flows concerning the political and administrative power are lacking, with the beneficiaries of the results of the Romanian academic system (students and employers), with the Romanian society in forming, but mostly, with global academic environments, with the effective involvement within the global decisional academic area. Studies concerning the Romanian society within the last few years do not differ from the conclusions of those who dealt with them in the

last two centuries, indicating a horizontal continuity. Abundance of resources allowed „the Romanian aristocracy” (in its broader sense) to continue to pay any price to satisfy the feeling of belonging, although only in a formal manner.

Concerning the past evolution of the academic system, we underline the structural and quantity changes which occurred in the last 20 years: numeric growth, through a dramatic increase, which was normal due to the transformation to which the entire society has witnessed (we also include here the inherent exaggerations), and the apparition of the private sector. We also mention here the restructuring and fractures which occurred after 1989 within existing academic structures. The new system which was being created structured itself fast through large values managed during the first decade and a relative managerial stability.

After that, the politicians either were content in managing the current issues of the university educational system, or conducted radical reforms. The lack of experience within administrating politics and businesses in a democratic system and our previous tradition transformed Romanian politics in an factor for turbulence, and even destruction. Also, within the university educational system the Romanian political class connected with formal and global structures, being a passive factor on the outside, whilst continuously varying between ignoring global processes or applying them in a more strict fashion than their authors. This continuous pendulum has tough repercussions on the actors involved in the Romanian academic life, sometimes catastrophically amplified by an unsupervised mass media sector. During these last years, the effort of power was focused on keeping pressure on universities to make them enter top 500 and to apply the criteria and means of organization which were in compliance with top global experiences while it was clear that the Romanian system was a medium one (with frequent, but singular, exceptions). Recently, there is a certain criticism within the media concerning the academic system, motivated by the voracity of staff and poor results within global rankings. Global ranking structures, however, look for system which introduce ratios of cost / quality of results (a graduate student in Romania costs 1000 Euros, whereas at top international universities the same student costs 25000 Euros and the abilities and acknowledgement on the international labour market are similar) which denies the results of the Romanian university system in a vigorous fashion.

Allocating public resources continued within the existing system, but at a minimal level. Under-financing of the system, and more particularly, a lack of coherent medium term policies accounted for many of the offices within the primary and secondary education systems to emigrate, with immediate effects on the quality of the formation of such systems. The academic system missed out on the conversion towards the acceptance and assimilation of the principles of the market economy, by the majority of graduates, thus generating a descending carousel, to which one could add the decline of the traditional family. Moreover, there are few researches on the new economy, which will follow the market economy, so just like global downfalls seem to indicate how global deciders act, so that the future seems uncertain. The allocation of resources generated several asymmetries: certain academic activities rely heavily

on budget allocation – others maintain themselves, and there are notable differences between gathered taxes and budget allocations, differences between the levels of taxes from the state and private sector respectively. In addition, there is no system in place for evaluating the effectiveness of allocations, be they private or state-bound. Implementing the quality evaluation system lead to an alignment with the European system and triggered the legal and natural restructuring of the system.

We cannot speak of an effective and perceivable reaction of employers, not even of state employers, where there are no notable progresses in the harmonization of the qualification system for crafts and the educational system. Although there are some formal structures, they are neither representative nor determinant for the system, as well as for the orientation of candidates, nor for creating a coherent and valid demand on a reasonable term.

The orientation of candidates is still left to its natural flow, to familiar decisions or individual ones, which involve higher costs for the graduates which are not integrated within the labour market and are not yet even EU-financed structures for career orientation. Students are only a formal part of the academic system, especially due to a lack of fighting spirit on behalf of the student organizations.

There is no medium term national political plan. Within the current tradition one reacts to the moment: now the need to decrease budget expenses from 7 % to 3 %. The need to change the academic system is used mostly as a reason to reduce budget finances or political advantages, and the reaction of the academic world is either singular, punctual, either indicates resignation. Universities are content to follow the political and administrative norms, starting with their inclusion within a system of self-destructive competition in spite of huge opportunities at a global or even local level. The most frequent reaction is to notice the decrease in the number of high-school graduates and their educational quality.

Now, MECTS applies

„The national evaluation methodology, which is an instrument by which the classification of universities is made into 3 categories, according to art. 193 of the National Education Law, nr. 1 /2011, published in the Official Monitor, year 179 (XXIII), nr. 18, of January 10th, 2011, and named, from here on, L.E.N.):”

- (a) *education centred universities;*
- (b) *universities centred on education and scientific research, or universities centred on education and artistic creation;*
- (c) *universities of advanced research and education.*

Also, the methodology of evaluation represents an instrument by which the hierarchy of university study programs is being realized.

The classification of universities and hierarchization of the study programs are two different activities.

In addition, the role of scientific research was exaggerated, without setting the framework for it or allocating the resources for the real engines of top research within university structures, which are very expensive – research institutes.

Major unbalances: aging population / active work force; youth / exported labour force; agricultural potential / propriety configuration; lack of agricultural resources / global purchasing layoffs, occupying some key points within the interconnected world / opening market and labour force supply; disorganized structure of the economy / disillusioned labour force, budgetary entrepreneurship, with their social, economic and political implications, have no coherent and effective answer from the academic world.

And LBUS finds itself within this context, at a medium level. The few attempts to change have failed due to a strict custom of respecting academic principles. Its size and philosophy, of a regional university, have granted it a certain tranquillity, which seems to be the silence before the storm.

3. LBUS Context

Since December 1989 LBUS surpassed the 50 teachers quota and 300 students to almost 700 teachers and 25-30000 students. The first decade was that of total liberalization of development, be it of quantity of offer and of international relations.

This explosion had its costs:

The University is more spread out in the entire town, the same as Cambridge today, although the image of its members is less centred on the campus idea. This comes as a result of the involvement of the local community in the development of the university but also of the university within the local community, at this time, the phase of symbiosis and a unitarian community is forming, especially because, in the future, Brasov is thought to become the regional urban development centred.

The city, in its medium size, has almost the same future as the University.

The quiet academic life of the provincial university did sometimes include different models of an academic lifestyle, dependant on the experience of the chosen teachers, for many of them this experience being the one gathered during the student lifetime. The communication of our academic community may be characterized especially with a flow of information between micro-communities with their own traditions and customs. This impacts the feeling of belonging in a negative fashion and impacts the charging power in an indirect fashion, when in competition with others.

As a result, a process of academic staff sedimentation takes place. As most young teachers come from LBUS itself, they have the tendency to continue the established traditions in each micro community. Import of staff does not bring a new perspective either, because the assimilations of university customs, from Western universities, are limited. Most staff comes from Romanian universities.

Students are more and more integrated within the life of the city (which includes the University), but are poorly active within internal academic life, due to a high percentage of low frequency students, which are absents per se, but also of the

relative quiet, indifferent attitude. Student organizations do not have powerful bonds with the mass of students.

The explosive development leads to a large number of fields, centred on the initiator of their development, at least at this stage. Two consequences: a low availability for dialogue and compromise between faculties / fields; the pulverizing of human resources by doubling them, made worse by the inability to generate internal dialogue within the university. The first signs of the probable failure of this structure are foreseen in the recruitment issues that occur, but mostly in the lack of excellence fields. We can hardly say that we have local schools in certain fields, even of a national level. We have individual excellence but as a „carrier school”, thus we are stuck at an average level, even one marked „provincial”. The few acknowledged conferences only confirm the exceptional character of excellence. Moreover, the doubling of programs and disciplines did not lead to a competition between faculties, as well as a lack of sources of income and expenses. Scientific research, organized by the Romanian model, lost its valuable research institutes and the research of real economics which existed once has now become entangled in formalities (articles, communications, patents, etc). at an available financing level, without trying an exit according to top universities (see below, next chapter).

The phenomena are already visibly acute concerning the masters and PhD studies fields (we purposely avoided naming it doctorate school, because, even though it is formally a school, it was not imposed as one). It is obvious that any attempt to restructure the organization towards the efficient use of human resources involves giving up on group interests. As we see the quality of the human material it is less likely that the members of the academic society would give up their existing privileges, most of them minor, and to engage in the fight for the interest and power areas. It is mandatory that the action of restructuring be imposed, or the actual conjunction triggered by the Ministry allows such an approach.

A good vision of the rectors allowed for free development of international relations. We can mention several accomplishments and actions, but almost exclusively (except for the Erasmus and Mundus programs), not yet valued at their true potential. Departures of students to foreign partners are in their early stages and teachers, with a few exceptions linked with personal interests have more likely made academic tourism. Lasting partnerships, common actions are extremely seldom, this while taking into account that we have 4 classic MBA programs which are organized in partnership with other universities and while the masters numbers are increasing. In other countries, as well as here, exceptions represent personal initiatives and do not have a tendency to involve collectives into a field. No „school” or lasting projects, acknowledged at least at a regional level (the EU or any other area) are exceptions! The few actions which began, some of them of great deepness, are vaguely known by our community which still did not develop the entrepreneurial style, compulsory in a world which still belongs to the market economy. One cannot even mention arrivals. I underline that these appreciations are made taking into account the mass of our community, not the exceptions which have generated the actions on which we brag,

but we cannot find them either mentioned or documented within the European academic world, for example.

Our university was organized as a regional one and continues to stay the same. The most conclusive argument is given by the decision of the regional candidates to come to us: who has money leaves abroad, who has less goes for an en vogue centred within the country, which has even less comes to us, and the rest, who have even fewer resources, go to private universities. In low-frequency education, within the territory, it is the status of state university which attracts, not our name. Statistics prove the solidity of this affirmation. The status of regional university is normal for the financial force of our university. Unfortunately, we did not make a name for ourselves within the academic community of the region. Although there has been a consortium for several years, only the recent Ministry pressure activated the university segment. For the moment, only the initiative and desire of the current management is present, while the community as a whole does not react. We do not have an effective information system concerning the future of graduates, so we cannot promote the efficiency of the formative component of the university through this point of view. Whereas, a regional university must find the regions, worldwide, for which it can fulfil UNESCO stated need, to open over 4 universities / year. The human principle is growth, stagnation or, regression which indicates how old it irreversibly is.

The toughest restriction is diversification and replacing old sources of financing through new sources. Subsistence is the tough restriction. It is becoming obvious that Romania will have fewer and fewer resources at its disposal, poorly allocated, uncertain. The actual size of the university (teachers' wages at a limit) cannot be maintained even on a short term without the restructuring of its income sources. The available resource is not expense reduction, nor personnel reduction, which were proven non-lucrative, rather personnel re-motivation. Firstly, in an academic way, as well as administratively. One cannot count on students: in essence, they are the raw materials and beneficiaries, not persons which are totally and directly interested. A first selection of those able to be self-motivated (and motivated by the system as well) is given by the ability to become involved in the regeneration of the entropy of our academic system. There is no need for arguments, they were analyzed and stated by Georgescu Roengen several decades ago. The time has come to apply the theory to its system. Regeneration of the systems entropy has as a main path a re-ordering of its elements, thus the continuous reshaping of our academic community. How must the new structure look like? I do not know of an effective proposal. The proverb is known that, if you modernize a brothel, you do not do it by changing sheets! (Beg pardon for the non academic language used, but the times are unprecedented!) Whereas the actual structure only has resources until September. The „chosen ones” are the ones that get involved!

4. Conclusions

Through the referendum organized by the university concerning the management system, the academic community has chosen the classic type of university, of self-regulating community, eliminating the managerial option which imposes the consideration of the university as a profit unit by mainly forming competence for the labour market and of an exclusively applied research activity; the idea of a community that looks for the truth and forms intellectuals.

We cannot decide instead of the community, but the elements stated above cannot be avoided within the decision making process. A short-term policy is not realistic, because the university is a vocational structure which is long-term oriented. At least in the medium term, with all the high speed of changes within the society and at a global level, the university must set its course in the general academic landscape of the world as a regional, classic one.

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