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The Romanian Modern University in the Frame of the Academic Profession and Governance

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Abstract

To develop education in a new economic context calls for new knowledge and new modalities of political governing. This paper explores how the academic profession in Romania perceives, interprets and interacts with changes in the socio-economic environment and in the organisational structure of higher education systems and higher education institutions. The analysis is based on data gathered to accomplish a cross study on the influence of the European governance in the countries involved in the EuroHESC project EUROAC – The Academic Profession in Europe: responses to societal challenges (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Ireland, Romania, and Croatia as Principal Investigators and Finland and Poland as Associated Partners). In our analysis we focused on the themes covering hierarchy, external decision maker (stakeholder) and management. The data are based on the results from an online questionnaire which was conducted in Romania between November 2009 and June 2010.

1. Background

The fundamental change of the Higher Education system is experienced through changing of the academic profession. The solution for meeting the demands on higher education institutions is to strengthen the management capacity. In the same context, Amaral, Magalhães and Santiago (2003:131) argue for "the need to provide institutions with management instruments and processes allowing for a more flexible and effective administration", but "in the latter case, the management tools and processes will remain instruments at the service of the institution and its leadership, without assuming a dominant role as determinants of the institution's objectives and strategies." But, during the last years the organizational patterns of university governance have changed as Bleiklie and Kogan have pointed out "the rise of mass education during the 1980s and 1990s made higher education and its costs more visible and contributed to a more intense focus on how higher education institutions are organized and managed" (Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007:482). There are opinions that universities must be organized and managed as business

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enterprises and become 'entrepreneurial' universities (Clark, 1998) or as school-based management, school-based governance allowing institutions more autonomy in decisions about their management (de Grauwe, 2005).

In 2009 a consortium of six states initiated an international survey of university academic staff, the aim was to obtain, analyse and compare information about the academic career and its challenges and changes, professionalization in HE, governance and third mission of the universities in Austria, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, Romania and Switzerland. Subsequently, at basic team joined Poland and Finland. This survey has been conducted on the basis of a modified version of the CAP Changing Academic Profession Project, 2008. The core part of the questionnaire includes: careers and professional situation, the work situation and activities, teaching, research, management, quality assurance and personal background. This article is based on the survey data of the academic profession carried on in 2010 within the EUROAC project and it analysis and discusses of the main issues on governance in Romanian HE environment.

2. Theme of governance

The subject of good governance is more relevant than ever not only for national and local actors, but also for regional and global actors. International and regional organizations, such as the World Bank, United Nations and UN specialized agencies (UNDP and UN-Habitat - for example, through the Global Campaign on Urban Governance), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union are interested in the issue of quality of governance. These concerns fall into a range of "globalization of norms of governance" [United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2004], in which many international and regional level events took place, especially in the last decade.

After 1990s the "new managerialism" became a dominant force in higher education. This concept integrates the freedom for institutions (in financial administration and management) with the supervision of educational and research affairs by the Government. As the governments act in various ways to decentralize decision-making powers, to allow autonomy to administrative agencies, and related with their commitment to market mechanisms then are various models of new managerialism. The goal is to regulate the relationship between the government and universities, to specify the position and active functions and to make clear the responsibility of the governments to oversee the provision of higher education. At a policy level, the implication is that for long-run growth, it is necessary to increase the stock of human capital through investment in education (Banerjee and Duflo, 2004).

During the last years, the importance of management has become a key point. The higher education environment is highly competitive in term of the competition for student recruitment, for research funds, and for the best staff. Moreover this competitive environment is encouraged by governments and funding bodies so the universities are forced to determine priorities in order to become more competitive themselves. The universities must build their strategies so they perform at the highest possible level in all fields. A strategic management needs to include relationships with the government and other funding bodies, with local or regional government, the local community and other groups, and organizations and individuals. From internal perspective, the strategic management must create a community of ideas that bring together all staff and students.

3. Romanian's context. Resources for education

In this part we intend to shortly present the current situation on governance issue. It is necessary to present the governance environment and its effect on the changing academic profession in Romania. During the last two years, the Romanian academia experienced considerable academic reform consisting in political, structural and financial changing. The transformations that are performed to a new structure rise conflicts in academia. In terms of governance and management the conflicts include: changes in administration and management from bottom-up to top-down; reduced basic financial provision for academic staff and universities; extensive research activities to teaching detriment; a rising of alienation in the academic staff; reinforcement of external evaluation.

In 1990 Romania began the educational reform. Regarding HE the objective was increasing university autonomy and the accountability of education through a system of public responsibility for efficiency. Moreover higher education reform has included academic evaluation, accreditation, and new financing systems. To reach these goals, new government institutions were created. These included the Department of Reform, Management, and Human Resources (under the Ministry of Education); the National Council for Educational Reform; and the National

Council for Evaluation and Accreditation [*]. At present, Romania's education system is at a cross-road. All important reforms ran in the last ten years need to continue in order to improve educational outcomes. According to the information posted on the website of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RAQAHE) www.aracis.ro, there are 57 accredited public universities, 28 accredited private universities, and 21 institutions enjoying temporary accreditation. In spite of this great number of public universities and as a general rule, in Romania, the GNP (gross national product) devoted to public education has been less than 5% during the last ten years. Moreover, this low level of public support isn't compensated through private support. As result of the financial strains in higher education is manifesting in academic year 2010 deep budget cuts, leaving positions vacant and salary reductions. It is difficult to predict the longer range consequences of this austerity, especially if some universities will have to fundamentally alter their instructional production functions.

4. Survey methodology

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with our European partners. The core questions pertain to the professional background, work conditions, institutional support, professional and research activities, management and personal background. In addition each national survey has been slightly modified by each country-based team to account national aspects. The Romanian team has added a short chapter dealing with quality assurance.

A two-stage sample was created: al the level of institutions and at the level of individual. At the institutional level, the universities were sorted to cover of the country (nation-wide and regional). The targets were all universities under the remit of the Ministry of Education (ME) and RAQAHE. All these education institutions offered undergraduate programs or higher. Within these institutions academic staff was surveyed. A clear definition of each academic range -all faculty members ("academic staff") with a valid employment status- has been used. The aim was to maintain an equal proportion of each academic range and research range.

Using the list of universities we created a list of potential individuals within these institutions. But these sampling is one of availability. Selection of respondents was not done randomly, but depending on the availability of e-mail addresses, the respondents' integration into the active business networks, the habit of using email and computer networks by potential respondents too and, as with any survey, the willingness shown by respondents to respond. There is, however, a risk that must be taken into account in interpreting the results, namely, that they can be easily influenced by the fact that the likely response rate is higher among those members of academic staff who are more active and more connected to the academic world news and among those who have no difficulty in using computers. The academic staff were selected and invited to participate both directly approached and by institutional approach. A national email database was generated. The request to complete the questionnaire was sent to the broad institutional and personal mailing lists, used in other projects. Also, personal networks of the authors of this report have been used similarly.

During the first two months when the survey started, the answer rate was very low. Also we received incomplete responses. According with this situation, another e-mail reminder message will be sent in February 2010 to 1100 individuals.

5. Results on Governance and Management

5.1. *Governance of academic careers*

The dynamics of the academia was studies from the point of view of the academic employment rules, the governance and career paths, the specific national of academic status, recruitment processes, career patterns, promotion rules etc. The role of decision makers in institutional development policy related with internal labour markets as a common evolution of national higher education systems has been pointed out (Altbach, 2000; Musselin, 2005). J. Enders (1999) highlights the increasing in the institutional level power regarding the management of the faculties, simultaneously with the diversification of the academic professions. Lewis (1975) specified that the higher education system is characterized by a specific legislation and organization this issue revealed the societal dimension of academic profession embedded in social norms.

5.2. *Stages of Academic Careers*

Due to the variety of the status composing each national academic environment the researchers are confronted with some difficulties when trying to identify the main stages of academic careers. The comparative analysis of the academic careers allowed the identification of three main categories that cover the national differences but allows for some comparisons: young academics, including doctoral and postdoctoral students, middle-ranking staff and adjuncts, and the professoriate.

5.2.1. Professors

During the last two decades the tasks of the professoriate (namely what the professors actually do) have changed. A „significant reconfiguration of academic work" has taken place and brought with it a shift in the balance of teaching and research (Altbach 2005:157). The trend observed since 1990s was the shift from teaching to research. As publications have become a measure of academic quality and prestige, the academic work changed their focus from teaching to research in order to succeed in the academic environment. The promotion of decisions in universities are following requirement „pressures for scholarly productivity and research activity increased" (Youn and Price 2009:215). But, the strong focus on scholarship has led to a decline in teaching quality (Allen 2009). There are strong arguments in terms of teaching and learning support (Boyer 1994; Court 1999; Braxton 2006; Altbach 2005; Tierney 2004).

Additional to the teaching-research nexus, another challenge rises to the professors as "managers" of HE institutions. Moreover, the expectations on external income generation differ depending on the position from which are addressed: income generation is regarded by professors as their least important task while institutional expectations are much higher.

5.2.2. Results

This study highlights the academic career issue and the political support: how to create an attractive European academic environment? It also provides the various aspects of academic careers.

a. *Respondents participation*

Table 1. Involvement in academic activities

During the previous current academic year, have you done any of the following?	
Served as a member of national/international scientific committees/boards/bodies	36%
Served a peer reviewer (e.g. for journals, research sponsors, institutional evaluations)	23%
Served as an editor of journals/book series	12%
Served as an elected officer or leader in professional/academic associations/ organizations	27%
Served as an elected officer or leader of unions	10%
Been substantially involved in local, national or international politics	24%
Been a member of a community organizations or participated in community-based projects	4%
Worked with local, national or international social service agencies	5%

From the point of view of the activities, during the previous current academic year, 23% of the respondents have served as a peer reviewer (e.g. for journals, research sponsors, institutional evaluations) and have been substantially involved in local, national or international politics. 27% of them served as elected officers or leaders in professional/academic associations/organizations and 10% served as editors of journals/book series and have been members of community organizations or participated in community-based projects. Only 4% of the respondents have been members of a community organizations or participated in community-based projects or/and worked with local, national or international social service agencies (see Table 1).

Considering the time spend in one of the typical activities the following results were reached (Table 2): regarding teaching (preparation of instructional materials and lesson plans, classroom instruction, advising students, reading and evaluating student work) and research (reading literature, writing, conducting experiments, fieldwork) we find that it is a balance between these activities with a weight of 35%-37% from time. 10% of time is allocated to other academic activities (professional activities not clearly attributable to any of the categories above), 11% for administration (committees, department meetings, paperwork).

Table 2. Time spend in academic activities

Considering all your professional work, how many hours do you spend in a typical week on each of the following activities?	
Teaching (preparation of instructional materials and lesson plans, classroom instruction, advising students, reading and evaluating student work)	35%
Research (reading literature, writing, conducting experiments, fieldwork)	37%
Service (services to clients and/or patients, unpaid consulting, public or voluntary services)	7%
Administration (committees, department meetings, paperwork)	11%
Other academic activities (professional activities not clearly attributable to any of the categories above)	10%

b. Hierarchy

The item begins with the statement that focused on institutional decisions-making processes and was followed by eleven completion statements related with key administrators, promotion and tenure decisions, budgetary decisions, teaching load and evaluation, admission standards, research strategy and evaluation and establishing international linkages. The results are present in Table 3.

Table 3. The primary influence on decisions -making processes

At your institution, which actor has the primary influence on each of the following decisions - making processes	Government or external stakeholders %	Institutional managers %	Academic Unit managers %	Faculty committees/ boards %	Individual faculty %	Students %
Selecting key administrators	3	18	21	42	5	1
Choosing new faculty	13	51	15	17	3	0
Making faculty promotion and tenure decisions	3	15	15	35	5	1
Determining budget priorities	7	52	20	11	5	0
Determining the overall teaching load of faculty	3	7	33	36	19	1
Setting admission standards for undergraduate students	0	10	66	11	8	4
Approving new academic programs	33	17	9	35	3	3
Evaluating teaching	2	10	62	3	7	15
Setting internal research priorities	2	24	58	5	10	0
Evaluating research	33	8	7	50	2	0
Establishing international linkages	3	34	0	4	53	5

The decisive factor in determining the overall teaching load of faculty, approving new academic programs and evaluating teaching is „*Academic Unit managers*" with a weighting of 62% of respondents' number. *Institutional managers* have the decisive resolution in the opinion of the respondents (50%) regarding choosing new faculty and determining budget priorities. *Faculty committees/boards* have influence between 35% and 49% in relation to decisions on selecting key administrators, making faculty promotion and tenure decisions, determining the overall teaching load of faculty, approving new academic programs, setting admission standards for undergraduate students and evaluating research. An influence of 32% is accorded *Government or external stakeholders* for approving new academic programs; otherwise the influence of these bodies is reduced. A majority of survey participants (57%) indicated that at their universities "*The faculty staff"* has the majority in taking decision regarding the establishment

of international linkages. *Students* have no influence at any level of the decision and the weight of their influence does not exceed 10%.

Table 4. Statements on institutional characteristics

At my institution there is…	1-Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5-Strongly agree
A strong emphasis on the institution's mission (%)	1	1	71	11	13
Good communication between management and academics (%)	12	18	52	9	8
A top-down management style (%)	25	6	4	36	30
Collegiality in decision-making processes (%)	77	9	6	0	8
A strong performance orientation (%)	10	66	6	12	6
A cumbersome administrative process (%)	25	17	34	17	8
A supportive attitude of administrative staff towards teaching activities (%)	4	21	36	31	7
A supportive attitude of administrative staff towards research activities (%)	20	45	10	0	25
Professional development for administrative/ management duties for individual faculty (%)	17	17	24	14	26

Institutional managers are not perceived to be strongly involved for any of the items under discussion (see Table 4). In this context only 25% of respondents perceive institutional management as „*there is a supportive attitude of administrative staff towards research activities*" and for „*professional development for administrative/ management duties for individual faculty*". A majority of survey participants (66%) indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that at their universities there is "*a top-down management style*". Only 8% of respondents claim that there „*is a good communication between management and academics*" and „*there exists collegiality in decision-making processes*". 6% of respondents perceive institutional management as strong *oriented towards performance* and 76% of respondents expressed a clear opinion of disagreement. Surprisingly, 42% of survey participants indicate that they strongly disagree or do not agree that *"a cumbersome administrative process"* existed at their institutions. 73% of respondents did not express a clear view on the importance of the mission of the institution. Despite the bureaucracy that these responses seem to indicate as characteristics of Romanian universities, respondents generally agree that a supportive attitude of administrative staff existed in their institutions.

Table 5. Involvement in academic management

Please indicate your views on the following issues:	1-Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5-Strongly agree
Top-level administrators are providing competent leadership (%)	23	8	23	23	22
I am kept informed about what is going on at this institution (%)	24	14	29	14	19
Lack of faculty involvement is a real problem (%)	24	20	32	8	16
Students should have a stronger voice in determining policy that affects them (%)	15	35	18	5	25
The administration supports academic freedom (%)	22	32	8	8	29

Around 23% of respondents express a clear disagreement regarding „*the level of information about what is going on at this institution*", „*providing a competent leadership by top-level administrators*" and „*that the administration supports academic freedom*" (Table 5). But, it should be said that, about the same weight, respondents strongly agreed on the same issues. A majority of survey participants (approximately 60%) of them expressed their agreement regarding *the degree of information on what happens in the institution* and *whether the lack of involvement of faculty in current issues is a real problem*. 50% of respondents disagree with the *real implication of the students in decision making* process on issues affecting them and 25% expressed strong agreement on this issue.

c. External decision maker (stakeholder)

Tables 6. Funds for research

In the current (or previous) academic year, which percentage of the funding for your research came from	
Your own institution	6 %
Public research funding agencies	54%
Others	<0.5%
Government entities	26%
Business firms or industry	11%
Private not-for-profit foundations/agencies	2%
National organizations/entities	20%
International organizations/entities	80%

54% of research funds come from the public research funding agencies, 26% from the government entities and only 6% come from its own respondents' institutions. Business firms or industry are less involved in research funding, funds raised from their being 11% (Tables 6).

d. Management

Table 7. Evaluation of the activities

By who is your teaching, research, and service regularly evaluated?	Your teaching	Your research	Your service
Your peers in your department or unit (%)	3	61	25
The head of your department or unit (%)	6	8	11
Members of other departments or units at this institution (%)	0	39	8
Senior administrative staff at this institution (%)	59	22	12
Your students (%)	9	7	1
External reviewers (%)	17	83	7
Yourself (formal self-assessment) (%)	3	99	1
No one at or outside my institution (%)	1	2	1

Periodic assessment of professional activity (teaching, research, service delivery to the community) is perceived as (Table 7): (a) in 60 percent, the teaching is valued by the head of the department or unit and senior administrative staff at the respondents' institution; (b) in 60percent, the research is valued by respondents' peers in their department or unit, in 83% by external reviewers and totally, 100%, the respondents himself; (c) the service is less evaluated, fewer than 12% for all academic units under discussion. An exception in weight of 25% for assessment made by the peers in respondents' department or unit exists.

Table 8. Academic management practices

To what extent does your institution emphasize the following practices? (%)	1 Not at all	2	3	4	5-Very much
Performance based allocation of resources to academic units	0	8	25	36	30
Evaluation based allocation of resources to academic units	25	12	25	0	37
Funding of departments substantially based on numbers of students	13	0	20	24	43
Funding of departments substantially based on numbers of graduates	24	13	23	27	13
Considering the research quality when making personnel decisions	0	0	33	41	25

Considering the teaching quality when making personnel decisions	6	12	19	50	13
Considering the practical relevance/ applicability of the work of colleagues when making personnel decisions	0	20	33	33	13
Recruiting faculty who have work experience outside of academia	6	29	17	24	24
Encouraging academics to adopt service activities/entrepreneurial activities outside the institution	0	6	6	44	44
Encouraging individuals, businesses, foundations etc. to contribute more to higher education	4	0	29	13	53

Regarding academic management practices, there is a clear opinion support coming from over 60% of respondents of the following (Table 8): "*performance based allocation of resources to academic units*", "*funding of departments substantially based on numbers of students*", "*considering both the research quality and the teaching quality when making personnel decisions*" and, finally, "*encouraging academics to adopt service activities/entrepreneurial activities outside the institution*" (external audit). A slightly unfavourable opinion expressed by over 36% refers to the following: "*performance based on allocation of resources to academic units*", "*funding of departments substantially based on numbers of graduates*", "*considering the practical relevance/applicability of the work of colleagues when making personnel decisions*" and "*the necessity to recruit faculty who have work experience outside of academia*". However, 52% of respondents expressed a clear disagreement related with "*preliminary evaluation based allocation of resources to academic units*". 53% of respondents strongly agree with "*encouraging individuals, businesses, foundations etc. to contribute more to higher education*".

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper we have been presented a brief overview of the Romanian EUROAC survey and a few preliminary responses that relate to the project themes of hierarchy, governance and management. The findings from Romanian survey may inform academia about their involvement in collective leadership, how to enhance professional activities and how to increase the participation in academic governance.

Managerialism refers to change in governance that has increased the role of administrators and government entities in terms of decisions and budget allocation. The survey instrument seeks to chart changes in the academic activities carried on by faculties and respondents and its reflection in academic staff's work attitude and career trajectories.

Respondents were asked which of the following parties has the primary influence on a given series of decisions: government or external stakeholders, institutional managers, academic unit managers, Faculty committees/boards, individual faculties and students.

Also, respondents were asked to look at their own institution and indicate their responses to statements relating to management and decision making processes. In terms of hierarchy, the Romanian EUROAC survey results indicate that in general „Academic Unit managers" are the decisive factor in determining the overall teaching load of faculty, approving new academic programs and evaluating teaching. Also, "Institutional managers" have the decisive resolution by more respondents regarding "choosing new faculty" and "determining budget priorities". At the faculties' level, more respondents (between 35% and 49%) feel that "Faculty committees/boards" have influence in relation to decisions on selecting key administrators, making faculty promotion and tenure decisions, determining the overall teaching load of faculty, approving new academic programs, setting admission standards for undergraduate students and evaluating research.

An influence of 32% is accorded to the Government or external stakeholders for approving new academic programs; otherwise the influence of these bodies is reduced. A majority of survey participants (57%) indicated that at their universities "The faculty staff" has the majority in taking decision regarding the establishment of international linkages. Students have no influence at any level of the decision and the weight of their influence does not exceed 10%, even in "Evaluating teaching". The influence of external stakeholders is limited; industry and business seem to have no impact of organizational design.

The items relating to academic management were highlighted in the EUROAC survey. An unexpectedly large number of respondents (42%) see their institutions as having an efficient administration and only 25% of respondents agreed that "a cumbersome administrative process" existed at their institutions. However, institutional managers are not perceived to be strongly involved for any of the items under discussion. In this context only 25% of respondents perceive institutional management having „a supportive attitude towards research activities" and for „professional development for administrative/ management duties for individual faculty". A majority of survey participants (66%) indicated their perception that at their universities there is "a top-down management style", whilst only 8% of respondents claim that there „is a good communication between management and academics" and „there exists collegiality in decision-making processes".

6% of respondents perceive institutional management as strong oriented towards performance and 76% of respondents expressed a clear opinion of disagreement.

More than half of all respondents felt themselves to be either little influential or somewhat influential in shaping key academic policies at some level.

Few respondents (11%) indicated they received funding for research from business firms; 54% reported the availability of research funding from public research funding agencies. Respondents indicated they were received external funds from international organizations/entities (80 per cent compared with 20 per cent from national organizations/ entities). This unexpected result must be interpreting as an increased rate of absorption of the EU structured funds.

Based on survey results, we will try to explore these findings of the survey and to highlight the reasons for the changes identified. The next action will be undertaking in-depth semi-structured interviews on governance theme. A limited number of interviews with selected academic staff and key institutional managers is proposed.

Also we intended to look for the answer if it is possible to correlate governance reform and the overall performance of the systems. In terms of decentralisation, are the changes of the hierarchical governance arrangements being replaced by greater institutional autonomy?

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