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**WPMM42 Sociology: Master's (Two Years) Thesis in Welfare Policies and Management**

**Internationalization of higher education in Romania: The  
Bologna Process - a successful reform model?**

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## **Abstract**

Internationalization of higher education, as a result of rational decision-making of the world education systems, has brought institutional changes -isomorphisms- affecting the way the educational reforms are implemented in Romania at the national and organizational level. Bologna Process or reform was adopted in Romanian higher education institutions following the convergence policy of European Union which are aimed at increasing the quality and the recognition of European Universities, enhancing mobility among students and academic staff, thus contributing to capacity building of academic institutions. However, country reports have suggested that Romanian universities de jure imitated the European reform, but the academic staff did not internalize de facto the changes produced by quality assurance institution - the cornerstone of the education reform. Moreover, the academic staff and the students, as crucial stakeholders of the higher education, do not participate at the decision making regarding the key issue of education. Therefore, by in-depth interviewing of eight professors and the student's representative from the Faculty of Sociology in Bucharest, I want to understand why Bologna reform has not been successfully implemented at the institutional level. In addition, an analysis of the governmental documents and strategies will be made in relation to the relevant internationalization discourse affecting the implementation of the Bologna reform.

The results of the paper indicate that Romanian higher education system has difficulties addressing significant priorities of the Bologna process, due to the rigid procedures the professors have to follow. Moreover, they complain about the malfunction of the institutional reforms, which draws attention on the bottom-up implementation of the Bologna process.

**Keywords: Internationalization, Bologna process, quality assurance, institutional isomorphisms, capacity building, rational choice theory.**

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Writing this thesis gave me the opportunity to gain a more profound understanding of the internationalization and Bologna process implications on the Romanian higher education, and how they affect the national stakeholders and the institutions involved in this global social phenomena.

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## **Introduction**

Higher education in European countries has been influenced by plenty of factors that determined a reorientation of its development strategies on a long-term basis. Among the factors emphasized in the literature are: globalization pressure on the public services and nation states; the end of the Golden age of the Keynesian welfare state of the last three decades of the twentieth century; the rise of knowledge based economies in the rich western Europe (Kwiek, 2004, p.761). Universalization of higher education, denationalization of economies, the commodification of education and research are processes affecting the old EU-15 universities. In comparison, the General Agreement on Trade in Services, declining public funding for public research and higher education, the emerging of for-profit and private universities and of education without borders are challenges affecting the transition countries from central and eastern Europe. The assumptions of the Bologna process rely on the fact that all European universities face similar problems and engage in homogeneous higher education structures, without taking into account the differences in terms of institutional capacity of the old EU-15 countries (such as Germany, France, Italy, etc) and the new ones (Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, etc). It is easy for the transition countries to change the national laws on higher education, especially if they are promoted as a part of the Bologna process developed by the Western European countries, but it requires more effort and time to achieve real institutional changes set up by the Bologna objectives. As a result of these two types of inconsistencies, reform on paper is the short-term solution of any policy change, which is reflected in the difficulties with which Romanian higher education institutions implemented the Bologna objectives. Romania as a transition country will be analyzed in this paper, for its gap between the de jure and de facto realities regarding higher education.

In the last decade Romanian higher education has witnessed noticeable reforms as a result of the increasing internationalization across the world. This concept encapsulates the cross-border mobility of teachers and students, of educational joint programs (Knight, 2004). Internationalization could be defined as a process and a strategy that pervasively affect all the structures of society, given its political, economic, cultural and academic rationale. Romania has officially adopted a diverse rationale corresponding with the necessities of the higher education system and the society at large. Nonetheless, special attention has been given to the economic motivation as it leads to economic development the government emphasizes in its legal papers regarding the education reform that started in 2005. The internationalization phenomenon spurred

worldwide debates with policy makers and researchers contending that education should be treated as a service traded and regulated by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Other researchers view internationalization as a cultural and academic exchange, as a capacity building of the institutions (Vincent-Lancrin, 2007). Internationalization developments are closely linked to the Bologna process, the latter emphasizing European regional issues and solutions arising from the incremental challenges of globalization intervening in the economic, political and higher education systems of the nation states.

Higher education structural reforms in the shape of the Bologna reform emphasized the impetus for improving the Romanian labor market by increasing the mobility of teachers and students, by stimulating students to engage in masters' and doctoral programs, thus enhancing their chance on the labor market. Since 2005, reports have suggested that Romanian higher education made progress in the quality assurance institution by developing new methodologies for external assessment of all universities in line with the European guidelines for quality assurance; in developing a three cycle system - Bachelors', Masters' and Doctoral studies; and in strengthening partnership and cooperation between higher education institutions from the European Common Higher Education Area. Moreover, the quality assurance institution has been given special attention at the European level, due to its legitimate power regarding capacity building and improving educational quality (Roman, 2008). Therefore, pressures to comprehensively include this standard, both legally and practically, have had negative results on some stakeholders - teachers and students - that were not granted the possibility to vociferate their interests within this process. However, a recent diagnosis of the Romanian higher education has been made by research institutions and academics and the following problems have been pointed out: a great number of Romanian higher education institutions do not meet the European quality assurance standards; academics and students participate at a lower degree in international development and research; Romanian labor market is incapable of including graduates as universities are not fully student-centered and do not prepare them to perform in the society; Romanian universities are not part of the global universities league; academic staff opposes reform attempts (Szolar, 2011). These issues are emphasized as a result of European objectives regarding the common Bologna strategy and internationalization process, as Romania has been included in the Common European Education Area and has committed itself to implement a set of policies that came under the umbrella of sound reforms. As a result of the Bologna reform being implemented as a

top-down process in the academic institutions, three types of institutional isomorphisms have been identified: coercive, mimetic and normative. They are representative concepts, explaining why and how the resistance of the academic community acts as an obstacle for a thorough institutional reform and is produced by the very mimetic and coercive types of isomorphisms.

## **1.1 Purpose**

My aim with this paper is to better understand what are the elements behind the internationalization of Romanian higher education and how did the education system assimilate the Bologna process at the institutional level. There is evidence of the malfunctioning of the Bologna strategy, but little is known about why this happens and how the universities tackle the challenges associated with it. The participants appropriate for the study are the academic staff, students representative and the agents holding management positions. The research aims at analyzing what is missing in the implementation of the Bologna process in one selected university. The analysis is important and valuable for the education system seen in a holistic way, as the stakeholders affected by the implementation of reforms are not always represented in the decision making processes, determining many negative reactions that impede the well functioning of the academic environment. Therefore, a qualitative approach could explain and give a clear account of what should be improved in the future.

## **1.2 Research questions**

The research questions of this work are an attempt to provide comprehensive answers and analysis to processes involved in the internationalization of higher education:

- What are the rationale behind the internationalisation of Romanian higher education? It is important to know why internationalisation as a process is an important element when analysing higher education at the national level. I will analyze the four crucial rationale or reasons of this process (the political, economic, academic and cultural-operational dimension of internationalisation process) with the intent to provide an ontological explanation behind the status quo of Romanian higher education institution. The ‘why’ question can not be detached from ‘how’, which emphasizes the means and strategies that have been taken for consolidating the higher education infrastructure. Moreover, answering the ‘what’ question

requires scanning the objectives established as a result of the rationale dogma. Therefore, I will try to answer the questions that are paid little attention from the political and academic community.

- How has the Bologna process been implemented at the institutional level? The Bologna strategy is a result of the internationalisation process which has received high support from the political actors, because it was perceived as a mandatory European Union directive prior to Romania's adherence to this supranational organisation. The Romanian government reformed the higher education law to prepare the setting for the Bologna objectives for fear of repercussions that might follow from the European Union had they not adopted it. Therefore, as this project has a top-down approach, it takes time to prepare the higher education institutions for a successful change. Even though the regulations and policies exist at the national level, many institutional units have failed to implement the Bologna objectives, especially those referring to quality assurance and student-centered learning (ARACIS, 2010). I will analyze the quality assurance institution and the student-centered learning situation in order to give an account of their position in the higher education institution. If the first one is accountable for transparency and openness towards the stakeholders affected by it, the latter consists of developing skills and competencies of students required for integrating in the labor market.
- How did the academic community internalize the top-down approach of the Bologna strategy? By internalization I refer to the degree the curriculum and the quality assurance are easily and non-problematically performed by professors and managers of the universities. The top-down approach of the Bologna process refers to the procedures and regulations adopted at the national level and their implementation by the stakeholders of the academic life. To address this question, there is a need for micro-macro approaches that stimulate the communication from an epistemological point of view. Micro and macro analyses will be used to show the disconnection between the macro structures represented by the law and regulations and the micro ones reflected in their internalization by the academic staff in an academic institution.

### **1.3 Methodology**

The research is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews to gather data from important



stakeholders of the higher education system that are excluded from the official decision making at the institutional level, namely professors and student's representative. In-depth interviews as a research procedure aims to reveal a more reflective understanding about the stakeholders experience of the Bologna process by disclosing the functionality and dysfunction of it in the university selected for the study (Seale et al, 2009, p. 25).

Individual interviews were selected for the reason of finding precise and rich data that will provide an explanation to my research questions. Nine professors, (including one dean and a vice dean) and a student's representative from a higher education institution from the faculty of Sociology in Bucharest were interviewed, while assuring the confidentiality of their responses. The interviews will be completed by official documents, laws and reports released in the last years regarding the implementation of the Bologna process, embedding this into relevant theoretical concepts. Analysis of the results will produce answers to the above mentioned questions and the findings will be validated by providing multiple sources and theories that will shed light on the subject, achieving the triangulation validation which many researchers claim to be crucial for a qualitative study (Patton, 1990 et al., 1993, Miles and Huberman, 1994). Methodological triangulation has been found to be beneficial in "providing confirmation of findings, more comprehensive data, increased validity and enhanced understanding of the studied phenomenon" (Bekhet 2012, p. 4). The paper approaches a qualitative study as the research questions open the road for an explanation and an analysis in terms of 'what and how', which is common in qualitative methodology. At the same time, it is important to understand the stakeholders involved in the process, in this case the professors, students, governmental agencies (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative research has been termed unscientific and full of bias by some positivist researchers, as it is committed to understanding peoples experiences by offering an interpretive account of it, which does not make it value free (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, pp. 5-8). In defense of this critique, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) underline the decontextualizing and depersonalizing of individuals and personal social events by quantitative research. However, by presenting sound and complex descriptive data qualitative research becomes a valuable method. More than this, some researchers agreed that 'no method grants privileged access to truth and all research approaches are embodied in cultural practice that postmodernists seek to make explicit' (Symon and Cassell, 1998, p.4). In qualitative research the rigor of data is ensured through adequacy and appropriateness; the former being attained when saturation occurs as a result of the

collected data, and the latter when the information is selected in a way to correspond to the theoretical needs and models used in the study. Analysis is a process that requires obtaining the data and interpreting the evidence through explanatory and descriptive lenses (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 219).

Furthermore, a content analysis will be used to analyze the interviews and the Bologna process documents implemented at the university level. A crucial part of content analysis is coding the concepts, words and themes referring to ‘a label attached to a section of text to index it as relating to a theme or issue in the data which researcher has identified as important to his or her interpretation’ (King, 2004, p. 257). According to Padgett coding qualitative data is a ‘process of identifying bits and pieces of information and linking this concepts and themes around which the final report will be organized’ (Padgett 1998, p. 76).

Validity in qualitative research involves measuring or explaining what is meant to be explained, thus it refers to achieving a high conceptual and ontological clarity (Mason, 1996, p.146). One method to assure the validity of a study is through data triangulation which makes sure that a research question is analyzed from more perspectives (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Reliability complements validity, referring to how precise and accurate the instruments and the research tools chosen for the study are, so the research can be replicated by others using the same instruments.

## **Conceptual framework**

### **2.1 Defining internationalization**

Internationalization is a global phenomenon that encompasses all the countries in the world, having a significant variation related to questions such as: how the internationalization is implemented and managed, what are the triggers of this process, what is the outcome and how is it to be understood. Internationalization is a concept that has received more definitions in the last years, one of it defined by Knight (2003, p. 2) as ‘the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education’. In the light of this definition, two important separate elements can be identified; the first is the “internationalization at home”, and the second is “internationalization abroad” (Idem, p.14). Internationalization at home is comprised of institutional strategies devised to intensify

students' experiences in an international context by improving intercultural abilities. On the other hand, internationalization abroad refers to students, professors, researchers mobility with the intention to increase intercultural, academic communication and cooperation. The same author proposed a refined definition of internationalization based on "changes in rationales, providers, stakeholders, and activities of internationalization" (Knight, 2004, p. 10). It has to be mentioned that this perspective is limited to the institutional and national level, which makes it the object of study in this paper.

Education systems are part of globalization processes that has produced meaningful changes in the way the knowledge economy functions, resulting in new models of supply of educational services. Along with it, internationalization as a phenomena brings foreign countries together by establishing partnerships among universities, importing and exporting at the same time the modus operandi of higher education practices such as mobility programs, online learning, distance learning. Globalization refers to competition, making higher education a tradable commodity and challenging the idea of education as a public good, whereas the roots of internationalization lay in the international cooperation between universities, encouraging mobility through the concept of achieving quality and excellence in education (Hristova et al, 2013, p.91). Altbach (2006, p.123) referred to internationalization as 'specific policies and programs undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments to deal with globalization'. According to Brandenburg and De Wit (2011) both phenomena are embedded in an ethical perspective condemning globalization as being bad and praising internationalization for being good. As a result, internationalization process is the preferred rhetoric in the discourse about higher education, ignoring the fact that globalization (actions related to higher education as a commodity) is promoted under the name of internationalization. This made up antagonism between globalization and internationalization produces acceptance of the latter, concealing the role globalization plays in higher education.

Qiang (2003) and De Wit (2011) claim that internationalization is a process by which cooperation and openness provide higher education the means to approach the global challenges rather than an aim. Moreover, higher education is the means for developing skills, improving research and innovation in a knowledge based economy, generating higher competitiveness in the global world. The role of the state has increased as the governments struggle to finance and initiate higher education policies in order to compete on the global arena (OECD, 2009). Bloom (2005, pp.

23-24) has established a correlation between the level of involvement of countries and regions in the globalized higher education and global competitiveness. In the same line, the countries' responses to globalization around the world have been noted in the rhythm with which reforms have been implemented.

Kälveborn and van der Wende (1997, p. 19) define internationalization as “any systematic, sustained effort aimed at making higher education (more) responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labor markets”. Therefore, the authors emphasize the higher education response to the growing economic, political, social changes due to the globalization process. However, this view has been criticized by Knight (2004, p. 10), claiming that the international dimension is contextualized in relation to the external environment, ignoring the education sector altogether. This assertion is supported by the argument of integrating internationalization processes at the institutional level, pointing to the micro level of the education system. Throughout this study I will use Knight's definition of internationalization in combination with the conceptual framework applied to higher education in Romania.

The internationalization concept is perceived differently among the stakeholders involved in the higher education institutions. Some understand it as enhancing student mobility, others as building cooperation and networks around the world, strengthening the communication among education providers worldwide. The European Commission promotes the idea of a centralized approach in higher education as the guiding model of internationalization, with two complementary strategies: national and institutional. Moreover, national strategy setting is diverse from the institutional planning of higher education. If the former is interested in the geopolitical context, the economic and national competitiveness and development, the latter is motivated by attracting new talented students from other international universities and improving the research network by joining international research institutions (Matei and Iwinska, 2015, p. 206). According to a survey including the responses of 175 education institutions conducted by the European University Association (Matei and Iwinska, 2015), it was demonstrated that there is a snow ball effect of implementing the internationalization strategy at the European level, leading to further developing national strategies, having a positive impact on the institutional level, and determining public attention to this topic. Other studies have shown that having an international strategy is not sufficient, as it needs to be coupled to other national priorities including economy,

technology, trade and migration (Idem, p. 207). Given the fact that many stakeholders are involved in this process, the attempts to ask for specific benefits are unavoidable, this being an obstacle to achieving consensus, which is the phenomena dominating the Romania higher education discourse.

## **2.2 Critiques of internationalization - Romanian case**

Current strategies that are being developed in regards to internationalization include the preparation of students for the global labor market, enhancement and internationalization of academic quality and improving institution's recognition and reputation worldwide (Deca, 2015, p. 129). However, these objectives are threatened by the increasing competition between higher education institutions; between companies whose goals are to allure graduated in highly desired positions; by the contraction of funding of the education system; by expanding significance of international ranking in classifying institutions which influence students' decisions in following a typical study program. At the same time, the discussions around the internationalization agenda have been met with a lot of criticism because stakeholders perceptions change constantly. There are four important critiques of the internationalization initiatives:

1. shifting from cooperation for "capacity building" to cooperation in order to create alliances to advance in the global competition;
2. shifting from an approach that offered students access to programs unavailable to them at home, towards a focus on attracting the best and the brightest students to one's institution;
3. shifting from solidarity and collaboration-based academic partnerships to "strategic partnerships linked to economic and geopolitical goals";
4. a tendency for higher education institutions to put more emphasis on prestige and positioning in rankings than on providing their students with as diverse an internationalization experience as possible (Idem, p.131).

In the face of this polemic, further explanations about the economic and marketisation discussion on higher education will be emphasized. The capacity building dogma mentioned in the first point is overshadowed by the inequalities determined by the uneven technological and institutional developments, where infrastructure and culture are not suitable for the modern knowledge society. With the advent of a group of people educated abroad that want to replicate the knowledge and the skills into their country of origin, the reactions of people who resist the

application of changes takes different forms. Sometimes it is difficult if not even impossible to implement the success models of advanced countries into the institutional, social, political and economic realities of Romania (Deca, 2015). Point two encompasses the issues related to brain drain, which mainly affects developing countries who lack the necessary funds to create programs tailored to international levels. Thus, students migrate to more resourceful countries where they can develop the skills and capabilities offering them broader career perspectives. This paradigm is considered to be a negative consequence of internationalization of higher education, and the answer to this threat is grounded in more internationalization, which will connect the home countries with the receiving countries into a dyadic relationship with positive long-term impact on both (Dima et al, 2012, p. 2).

Point three is highly criticized by authors, as globalization, commercialization, competition have distorted the role of higher education which has become a commodity on the market as other raw materials or goods. Quality of education has been obscured by the economic and financial logic under the innocent idea of internationalization (Jiang and Carpenter, 2014, p. 56). The shift of universities from service status to the labor market status has changed their purpose from knowledge based institutions to institutions complying to external demand. At the same time, the Law 288 (2005) proposed by the Romanian Government created the framework for a two-tiered education system (three years of Bachelor and two years of Masters'), where specific requirements regarding the competences and the practical knowledge gained by students were made public. The rationale behind the law was to "eliminate excessive specialization", contributing to the "development of new qualifications related to current needs and the labor market", being in line with the " dynamics of labor market at the national, European and international level"(Wodak and Fairclough, 2010, p. 32). Therefore, the justification is entirely economic, with no references to the common European identity and culture. Point four above has been made clear by establishing concise objectives regarding the mobility of students abroad, with a target of 20% of mobile students by 2020. However, enlarging students' experiences within the international context has not been met so far; only 10% of outgoing students and 1% of incoming students have been reported in the national statistics. Data about the rate of outgoing students coming back to Romania is missing altogether (UEFISCDI, 2012, p. 26). The Romanian government currently does not have a solid strategy for increasing the number of mobile students, due to a lack of funding and dissemination of information.

### **2.3 Perspectives of internationalization in higher education**

There are more typologies of internationalization of higher education, but the most relevant institutional level perspectives for the scope of this paper are the following: competency, ethos, activity and process approaches (Knight, 1997). These approaches are developed by Knight to guide the way the policies and practices are implemented at national and international level. The term process approach is included in the author's classification to provide a better description on how the internationalization is implemented and conceptualized (Knight, 2004, p. 18). Even though there are many approaches that address the process of internationalization, they reflect the values, resources, politics, history and the priorities the countries engage in a particular period. So there is no common or right transitioning from one approach to another, instead every country proceeds in its own manner. Therefore, I will operate with these four types of approaches in the next chapter to show what drives the internationalization of higher education in Romania.

### **2.4 Rationale behind internationalization in higher education**

Over the years, researchers studying the internationalization of higher education have pointed out frameworks and conceptual tools through which this process could be explored and explained in different countries. Knight (1997, 2004) and De Witt (2011) have identified four rationale applicable to the internationalization of higher education at the national level: academic, political, economic and cultural rationale.

1. The academic perspective refers to achieving international standards regarding research and teaching, with a focus on excellence in research. However, increasing controversies revolve around the homogenization and uniformity of higher education as a result of international standards, which calls for more locally based programs and policies.
2. The political dimension implies ideological pressure established by the internationalization dogmas, focusing on achieving stability and national security. This approach had an important role in the past. Nowadays national cultures are threatened to be disintegrated due to the increasing importance of globalization and internationalization, thus keeping intact the national unity is an underlying rationale of the internationalization. Investment in higher education is seen as a significant act which contributes to the

preparation of diplomats and leaders that need to be acquainted with the international paradigms.

3. Nevertheless, in line with the massification of higher education, country's foreign policy is interested in making education an export product, thus changing it into a commodified good. This phenomenon of shifting to a market dimension introduced the economic approach in higher education, which emphasizes the role of human capital and human resources developed at the national level in order to become competitive at the international level.

4. The cultural perspective asserts the importance of the local, national and international triad in developing the skills of the citizens. Ethnic and cultural diversity is a social fact present within and among nations, being considered a strong reason for internationalization of education. The cultural or social perspective focal point is the development of intercultural communication and abilities of students in an ever increasingly interconnected world thus, promoting "local, national and international citizenship" (Knight, 1997, p.11).

## **2.5 GATS and higher education**

Romania has been a member of World Trade Organization since 1995 and it adhered to GATS-which is a treaty of the WTO- by committing to the mechanisms and components created by it. Liberalisation of services sectors represents a commitment member countries engage in; education being a service of greater importance emphasized in the General Agreement on Trade in Services. GATS identified four modes of trade in education:

Mode 1, cross border supply – comprise services through international mail, internet, teleconference facilities;

Mode 2, consumption abroad – students studying abroad;

Mode 3, commercial presence – foreign direct investment in the form of setting up branches in the territory of another Member State;

Mode 4, presence of natural persons – 'temporary' (with temporary yet to be defined) entry of workers in the territory of another Member State (Robertson, 2006, p.9).

Behind the cultural rhetoric of internationalization stands the economic national interests, with many entrepreneurial higher education institutions recruiting full-fee-paying students, increasing at a higher pace the volume of student mobility from developing countries to developed ones (Marginson, 2004, p.138). Trade in education became an industry successfully reaching the peak



in 2000, at the same time it raised controversial questions in terms of education as a public service provided by the state, and as a service which could be delivered in accordance with the global trade laws.

According to Altbach (2004, p. 2) 'there is a recognition that higher education is a complex phenomenon involving not just the marketplace but also national culture, the values of society, and access and social mobility...it is therefore a public good and to some extent a public responsibility'. Conversely, Sauve (2001, p. 16) claims that governments are not obliged to affiliate to WTO and they can decide by themselves whether to liberalize their education services and trade them internationally. More than this, the author argues that "the market for trade in education services is big, diverse, innovative and growing fast. It will almost certainly continue to grow as societies place an increased premium on human capital enhancement as a source of development and as a means of better equipping individuals and societies to confront, adjust to and take advantage of the demands arising from closer economic integration.'(Idem, p. 4).

The Romanian government perceived the GATS as a necessary tool for bringing foreign investments and improving the expertise in the under-financed higher education systems. Therefore, it could be stated that the lack of state investments in education sectors was offset by the GATS market initiatives. Nonetheless, Romanian higher education has faced great difficulties in accessing the global markets because of the complex regulations and mechanisms concerning the evaluation of quality of domestic universities, which Romania did not fulfill because of the institutional inertia. As a result, the reproduction of 'diploma mills' generated low education services quality, which disrupted Romanian higher education from the opportunities of successful internationalization. Only the mode three has been de facto inserted in the Romanian higher education context, the main reasons the others were not included consists of the lack of linguistic facilities, of top Romanian universities recognized internationally, all explained by the immature education institutions which work on the principle of political capital. Moreover, the Article 13 of the human rights convention contend that higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, in particular by the gradual introduction of free education. To guarantee this, states must ensure availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability (High Commissioner Human Rights (2002, p. 17).

The Commission on Human Rights shows how the GATS could exacerbate social inequalities in education: cross-border supply benefits those nations having a modern infrastructure;

consumption abroad could lead to a dual market of fees; commercial presence raises the problem of regulating foreign suppliers so the services will not become too expensive and broaden the inequality gap; the presence of natural persons facilitates knowledge transfer, but it could trigger brain drain (Robertson, 2006, p.12). The existing tension between education as a trade good and as a human right seem to dominate the discourse over liberalization of higher education. Once the member states of GATS permit education to be traded globally and to be seen as a commodity, they fail to ensure that education is a right, leading to its purchase only by those affording it.

The theoretical foundation of GATS is to remodel education into a business like enterprise, creating universities that sell knowledge and services for ‘universities as idea-generating powerhouse are prime targets for investment, by knowledge-based industries and their potential has been enhanced by the protection of ideas, as intellectual property generated by research, under copyright and patent laws and global trade agreements’ (Spring, 2009). Nevertheless, there are both supporters and opponents of GATS in higher education; its advocates identify a set of possible opportunities for all the countries, while its adversaries point to what will be lost by transforming higher education into a commodity. For the former, free trade of services in higher education will bring economic benefits which could not be achieved without liberalization of services (Dunkley, 2004, p. 18). However, this is true for nations that have long-standing higher education systems which can compete on the global market. In this line of thought, Romania is not able to compete institutionally, instead the liberalization of higher education contributed to a flow of students to Western and US education institutions, enforcing the positive economic and cultural effects upon their return to Romania. Asserting that ‘free trade is generally best for all people in all countries at all times and that it brings assured gains, leading to long-term economic growth and development’ (Idem,p.19) overshadows the internal issues and institutional differences between countries, which cannot be tackled by following the free trade dogma. Countries trading their higher education systems specialize in this product and make huge investments in it, so they could import other goods in exchange for the higher education supplies. The World Bank imposed itself as an actor in influencing the higher education sector in post-communist Romania, encouraging the idea of paid education and opening access for “talented, but needy students” (Curaj et all, 2015, p. 13). The World Banks’ objectives were to diversify the higher education system, to increase academic performance, to introduce and develop new areas of study in relation to the market demands and to implement modern teaching

tools and learning methods. Further involvement of the World Bank in higher education concentrated on developing a student loan scheme in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The reason behind it was to increase accessibility to higher education to people excluded from the system by giving them loans to cover tuition fees and living costs during the study years. An Agency for Student Loans and Scholarship was created in 2011, but the institution does not function, as it does not contain an allocation procedure established at the national level which could be distributed to universities. However, the usefulness of such an initiative has been debated as students prefer to borrow money from parents, relatives and to find a part-time job to support their expenses (Curaj et al, 2015, pp.14-15). This behavior is mirrored in the dropout phenomena, data showing that the average time a student spends in higher education is 1.5 years, with only 16 % of those aged 25 to 34 enrolled in higher education compared to the 29% in the European Union (Idem, 17). Conversely, in Denmark universities are legally enforced to provide help to students who are on the verge of dropping out. In Sweden, universities are obliged to offer students information relating to program studies and to labor market opportunities. In Norway, a special institution, the Student Welfare Organization, has been created for providing the necessary help and services to students (The European Higher Education Area, 2012, p.89). Even though the legal framework functions in the Nordic countries, Romania faces a situation of incongruity between the official legal statements of the higher education process and institutional development at the local level. It could be concluded that the bank loans ethics for studying purposes is not ingrained in Romanian mentality, this being explained by a variety of cultural and social factors related to the tradition of education in the communist regime.

## **2.6 Rational choice theory**

This theory accounts for understanding the purposes lying behind internationalization processes. Rational choice theory is built upon a methodological individualism philosophy which characterizes individuals' actions in terms of costs and benefits. George Homans established the rational choice theory in sociology, with many others, Coleman (1973) and Cook (1977), expanding on his theoretical framework (Scott, 2000 in Browning et al). The theory allows for an extension of rationalist boundaries by analyzing the micro social elements (norms, preferences, values) in conjunction with the macro elements (institutions, structures), which offers a

comprehensive view of the processes undertaken by human agents and institutions in meeting their goals. Therefore, if we take into account the social context rationality we could make the assumption that conditional laws are being established by individuals who are a part of the context (Lichbach, 2003, p.29). To understand why internationalization of higher education in Romania has had mainly an economic rationale, while discarding the others, it is relevant to analyze the micro and macro institutional dimensions of the Romanian higher education context. The public discourse in Romania revolves around the gap between the labor market needs and the products of higher education. The Law 288 specifies a set of general and narrow competencies to be achieved by students in universities, which must be in line with the labor market at national, European and international level. The government expressed its policy development preferences mainly in an economic manner, which became the cornerstone of internationalization in the Romanian context. This could be explained by the rational choice theory, as the decision making actors pursue their interest-consolidating political power- which will generate more benefits than costs. Consequently, considering that actors have their own interest, they will try to control resources and events affecting their interests. However, interests are rooted in norms and in the social structures leading to rational decision-making. The meaning of the term norm used in this analysis encapsulates the usual behavior the society is following, without being desirable or undesirable (Edgar and Sedgwick, 1999, p.262). Even though rationality as a minimalist concept is perceived as “consistent, future-oriented, and instrumentally efficient behavior”, meanwhile “the operation of norms is to a large extent blind, compulsive, mechanical or even unconscious”, it should not eclipse the normative aspects of an action or activity whose interest is rationally valued (Mouzelis, 1995, pp. 28-38).

At the same time, Elster Jon (1989) claimed that self-interest and social norms cannot be followed harmonically, instead some actors will engage in self-interest activities while ignoring social norms and vice versa. This dichotomy is misleading, as it is evident that interests are socially constructed, which means they will result in norms. The statement is reflected in the stakeholders’ diverse actions trying to impose their interests in the higher education landscape. Historically, professors dominated the academic institutions, meaning that the relationship between them and the students was uneven, which set the ground for a long tradition of professors as communicators of knowledge and students as receivers of it. This academic norm was constructed in a period when negotiations for achieving consensus were downplayed by the

political system and only the social actors whose power was legitimized by the legal framework could influence the decisions. Students' interests have become a matter of importance in later years, followed by the Bologna process implementation, which required a reconfiguration of the norms. Negotiating students rights and necessities was officially established by law and incorporated in all the universities plans in the last years (QAR, 2010), but it did not transform into a norm recognized and accepted by all stakeholders of the higher education system. The costs of a loss of norm for the higher education system brings anomie (Durkheim in Hechter, 2001), describing a situation when the system loses its direction and does not have a well-established meaning for the people engaging in it. Thus, it could be stated that the norms guiding the higher education system now are in a process of transition, with more external stimuli coming in the form of legal pressures from the European Common Higher Education Area with its Bologna process. At the same time, saying that students are stakeholders incorporated in the internationalization process faces a crucial task of constructing and making evident their interests and implies reshaping the rights and duties ascribed to them by the government agencies and universities altogether, and de facto acting upon them.

If the political, cultural and academic perspectives dominated the higher education scene before 1990, many scholars point out the economic rationale has started to become the cornerstone in the last years, with variations in different countries (Kälvermark and Van der Wende, 1997). There is a need for balance between the academic and the economic rationale, so the generations involved in the internationalization process would benefit from the rationale the governments and the education institutions find the most advantageous.

## **2.7 Capacity Building concept**

Capacity building is a concept associated with development strategies the international organizations undertook to strengthen the developing countries institutions. However, the concept has received growing attention in the policy making, as public interest has started to be achieved through market-oriented channels, as it is encountered in education policy. A definition of the term was offered by the Dictionary of Public Administration: 'capacity building... includes among its major objectives the strengthening of the capability of chief administrative officers, departments and agency heads, and program managers in general purpose government, to plan,

implement, manage, or evaluate policies, strategies or programs designed to impact on social conditions in the community' (Dill, 2000, pp. 211-212). The first part of the definition emphasizes the importance of developing human resources through training, while the second part focuses on capacity building which is determined by the agencies capacities to create and implement significant policies, to evaluate performances guiding the actions of individuals. Moreover, the capacity building initiatives should include institutional reforms, together with developing human resources and organizational enhancement, as they have the capacity to transform the rule of the games the individuals and the organizations rely on for making decisions. Capacity development initiatives establish monitoring systems, regulatory frameworks that act as informing tools supporting the performances of governments, public officials and markets. According to Vincent-Lancrin (2007) capacity building is achieved through training and teaching individuals with the purpose of maximizing the stock of human capital and productivity. Even though many countries think that cross-border education enhances the capacity building through increasing the quality, quantity and significance of domestic higher education institutions, the means by which this is done in the Romanian context minimizes the likelihood of capacity development of academic institutions.

## **Internationalization in Romanian higher education and Bologna process**

### **3.1 Academic rationale behind internationalization**

Academic rationale promotes and generates policies based on cooperation between international higher education institutions, but the competitiveness elements cannot be detached from cooperation (Huisman & van der Wende, 2004). International academic standards contribute to quality of higher education institutions which have to internalize this internationalization rationale for its success. As university rankings have become the yardstick of global education system, the evaluation of universities in terms of competitiveness is of crucial importance. Firstly, these rankings play a role in providing stakeholders the information about the value or quality of the academic institutions, which enhances the transparency at both the national and the international level. Secondly, as the rational choice theory contends, students' choices of their future education will be based on the cost and benefits of enrolling in a particular university (Boudon, 2009, p. 180). Therefore, the most favorable results are to be taken by stakeholders of

the higher education system, maximizing their decision-making. It is important to emphasize that the academic rationale, through its international research and teaching dimension, contributes to the institutional capacity building, to increasing the reputation and the status of universities, thus it is an essentially institutional rationale. National education strategies have been developed to address the aforementioned academic rationale. The National Strategy on Research, Development and Innovation 2014-2020 was elaborated by the Romanian Ministry of Education and its main aim is to improve the quality of the higher education system for a better match with the needs of the labor market. This strategy incorporates multiple internationalization activities, such as joint international research programs, academic and student mobility, curriculum innovation. One of its goals is to include Romanian universities in the international ranking, by increasing the number of patents the research institutions and universities will create, from 20 in 2014 to 60 in 2020; and by augmenting the number of scientific publications accessed by the international community (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Secondly, the Bologna Strategy 2020 continues to implement the main objectives set up in the previous years that were not fully achieved, such as student and academic mobility, convergence of the education system at European level, joint programs, student centered learning, lifelong learning. These intentions were complemented by new objectives rooted in the nowadays social-economic realities like integrating the disadvantaged people in the higher education system, by creating the proper conditions allowing them to be enrolled without paying the tuition fee. Furthermore, internationalization of universities activities and strengthening the global collaboration between them was highly emphasized in the Bologna Declaration, as it will open the attractiveness of European universities to international students and academic staff. The academic rationale acts as an imperative for improving academic quality, reflecting a general consensus that internationalization serves as a cornerstone for economic growth and competitiveness.

### **3.1.1 Economic rationale**

In line with the massification of higher education, countries' foreign policy is interested in making education an export product, thus changing it into a commodified good. This phenomenon of shifting to a market dimension introduced the economic approach in higher education, which emphasizes the role of human capital and human resources developed at the

national level in order to become competitive at the international level. We are witnessing an expanding interconnection among nations, where technological and scientific competitiveness requires the development of high skills. Teaching competencies for the labor market is of paramount importance for placing nations in an international context. Debates on whether higher education is a product on the international labor market, which leads to the internationalization process in research and teaching are gaining ground, skepticism over this issue being embraced by the academics and policy makers (Knight, 1997).

However, the internationalization of higher education has extended beyond teaching and research, it has expanded into the international labor market and include activities which would improve the competitiveness among countries. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that this process has been more pronounced in some countries, while others have imitated or simulated a close version of it. Maassen, Nokkala and Uppstrom (2004, p.37) have mentioned that the economic rationale is less prevalent in the Nordic higher education institutions, given that education is a public good and should not be imbued by the export dimension. Conversely, other governments regard higher education as an exportable good, encouraging the recruitment of foreign students and engaging in contract education, which will generate income. According to a report commissioned by the Romanian government (UEFISCDI, 2014, p. 110), it was shown that universities are not bound by law to impose a minimal education fee for foreign students, which makes the education service a market where demand and supply is negotiated. Subsequently, this practice raises serious questions of transparency principles which could be one of the explanations why Romanian academic institutions are not included in the top global universities.

Education is perceived to be a commodity on the market, being pervaded with the business element that determines students to be consumers, professors to be producers, both social groups having to adapt to changes in the industry (Tan, 2014). However, the benefits of higher education go beyond economic values, as education has a cross-sectional characteristic with an impact on all sectors in society. More than this, there is a great effort at improving the convergence between inter-institutional, intergovernmental, and supranational levels.

### **3.1.2 Cultural rationale**

This rationale emphasizes the importance of understanding foreign cultures and languages. Enhancing intercultural communication is achieved through student mobility and international



curricula which Romanian higher education institutions officially engaged to integrate as a result of the Bologna strategy. However, student mobility is reduced by the scarce financial conditions of the parents (Zamfir, 2007), therefore, the economic reason decreases the likelihood of a cultural perspective to develop in the Romanian context at the same level as Western European countries.

International curricula is existent at the faculty level and academic staff considers it as a crucial rationale for internationalizing the learning and teaching experience, but the lack of funding for research programs and conferences held abroad is one crucial impediment for a real cultural positioning in the internationalization process.

Individual and institutional social benefits of international mobility go in line with the ‘Mobility for better learning’ Romanian strategy that acts under the umbrella of the 2020 mobility strategy of the European Higher Education Area. This strategy’s aim is to increase the number of outgoing and incoming students and academic staff, with the intention to strengthen the intercultural communication which is of great value in the labor market. More than this, the Romanian government has engaged in bilateral partnerships with the Moldavian and Hungarian universities, both countries having common historical links with Romania (Curaj et al., 2015). Linguistic, ethnic and cultural similarities between these countries enabled the mobility of students and professors within their academic borders. However, lately political divergences between Romania and Hungary have triggered negative reactions, some universities deciding to lower the quota for students of Hungarian ethnic background. Therefore, it could be stated that the cultural dimension of internationalization of higher education is influenced by the political interests, reducing the opportunities of students to have access to the intercultural and knowledge exchange between countries.

Even though all four aforementioned perspectives seem to have in common strong motivations for legitimizing the adoption and implementation of internationalization regulations and procedures, they are not successfully achieved beyond the projects and objectives written on paper. The practice and the legal framework are two completely different realities with the latter dominating the internationalization of Romanian higher education.

### **Table 1. Rationale driving internationalization**

<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Existing-National and Institutional Levels combined</b>
Social/cultural	National cultural identity Intercultural understanding Citizenship development Social and community development
Political	Foreign policy National Security Technical Assistance Peace and mutual understanding National Identity
Economic	Economic growth and competitiveness Labor Market
Academic	Institution building Profile and status Enhancement of quality International academic standards International dimension to research and teaching

Source: Knight, J. (2004), Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches and Rationales, Journal of Studies in International Education, Vol.8, No.1, 5-31.

National and institutional level rationales differ in terms of the importance given by different countries, depending on factors such as the mission of the country, funding sources, level of sources, and the orientation to local, national and international interests (Knight, 2004, pp.24-25). Institutional level rationales will be given more attention as my argument stated in the beginning

of the thesis is that internationalization of higher education in Romania is a top-down process (given the countries lack of institutional democratic infrastructure as a result of communism) affecting the way the institutions implement the programs at the micro level.

International profile and reputation drives universities to achieve worldwide recognition to attract the best students and scholars, research and training projects. Knight (2004) suggests there is a shift from high-quality academic performances for professors and students to using academic guidelines for branding reasons in order to compete nationally and internationally. University rankings became a relevant yardstick for the global higher education system, helping students and academics to make decisions based on transparent instruments. More than this, the rankings enhance communication between stakeholders and contribute to the image-building of universities. Student and staff development emphasizes the skills these social actors need in order to understand intercultural and international conflicts as they become more complex in today's societies. Internationalization at home has become one of the elements contributing to increasing cultural diversity at the workplaces and in the communities, nonetheless, there is an ambivalence whether this type of internationalization stimulates or responds to the incremental importance of staff and student development as a reason for internationalization.

In the last years, many universities have developed programs fully taught in foreign languages, but only few of them ( the ones that rank high in the national university classification) have managed to attract international students, the reason being faculties lack of international recognition. Romanian universities have introduced Bachelor and Masters programs entirely taught in a foreign language, which increased the number of international students, especially those opting to study medicine. Nonetheless, the number is too low when compared with other countries, as a result of the incomplete visibility of Romanian universities in the international ranking system.

Economic development reflects the public institutions interest in creating internationalization activities to produce alternative sources of income. Income generation is a controversial issue, many suggesting that it is profit oriented and not for cost recovery, even though state-owned universities in Romania are compelled by the internal regulations to reinvest the money in underfunded activities, such as research and training. Conversely, private providers of higher education are motivated by the profit and business part of this service, transforming it into commodified and commercialized goods.

Knowledge production and research shows the crucial significance the higher education institutions hold today. Due to the growing interdependence among nations, many global threats and issues cannot be addressed at the national level only, instead international collaboration is needed, which is why institutions and governments include research and knowledge production in the internationalization dimension. Government funded research in the higher education sector is scarce in Romania, 0.38% has been invested in 2013 (Eurostat, 2013), thus, the importance of knowledge production is not reflected in the investments made.

### **3.2 Perspectives of internationalization of higher education**

- The competency approach states that “internationalization is a change process from a national higher education institution to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competences”(Soderqvist, 2002, p.29). Moreover, internationalization is claimed to be responsible for improving teaching and research characteristics of higher education institutions; preparing the research staff and the students (Van der Wende, 2007); attracting foreign students (Lipsett, 2009). There is an incremental interest in the competency perspective in Romania as it connects the labor market demands with the attitudes, skills, values and knowledge provided by the higher education institutions.
- The ethos approach indicates that internationalization strengthens the international dimension of higher education with the help of national institutions (Hanson & Meyerson, 1995). Moreover, the supporters of this approach consider that only through creating a robust belief system and a culture embracing the international dimension could the national institutions internalize the values attributed to internationalization (Knight, 1994,;2004). The academic ethos, originating in the way the things are done at the micro-level is significant for a successful reform in higher education institutions.
- The activity perspective emphasizes the role of curriculum in the international education of guiding to “international cooperation, enhancing national security and improving economic competitiveness”(Powell, 2004). Focusing on increasing the number of incoming and outgoing students, by adding into the curriculum programs for foreign students, setting up institutional linkages, the activity approach seems to be the most common perspective to

internationalization of higher education in Romania, as all the aforementioned elements are given priority in the official documents, more precisely in the operational strategies of universities and faculties. Outgoing student mobility (3.2% in 2004) overcomes the incoming students flow (1.7%), which is a normal situation for Central and Eastern European countries which provide students for Western countries (Roman, 2008, p.8). In 2009-2010 Romanian universities have sent 25.100 students abroad as a result of increasing mobility programs, compared to 3.100 incoming students (Feder, 2011). However, there are no empirical data about the contributions and the benefits the returning students brought to Romania in terms of economic, cultural and social aspects. Therefore, it could be stated that the set of opportunities the trade of higher education brings to Romania, as a sending country, remains unknown and under-researched.

- Lastly, the process perspective (De Wit, 2011) refers to the existence of a body of policies and procedures that contribute to the integration of international aspects into research and teaching. One of the most important elements in the process approach is integrating the international and intercultural viewpoint in the way teaching and research are being done. Accordingly, international policies, statements and planning are of great importance to setting national higher education institutions' goals, programs, infrastructure (Knight, 1994, p.7). Soderqvist (2002, p. 29) asserts that internationalization is 'a change process from a national higher education institution to an international higher institution leading to the inclusion of international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies'. However, this definition incorporates the importance of institutional management in assuring the positive effect on learning and teaching, ignoring other relevant dimensions of internationalization. This approach captures the dynamics of the internationalization process which contains the progressive and evolving element in it.

Given the existence of a strong process approach, many academics feel dis-empowered and disconnected from the decision-making, which triggers negative consequences such as resistance to reforms. In Romanian higher education institutions, strategies related to both academic and organizational internationalization enhance the international dimension of education. Global-local reflexivity is imbued in the aforementioned perspectives, as it aims at achieving global

comprehensive competencies at the local level (Rizvi, 2007, p. 6). Therefore, academic staff and students reproduce the knowledge and skills created by the mobility conditions, uncritically accepting the model related to global interconnectivity. Conversely, internationalization refers to social actors that understand the global processes, when they have a critical eye and when they can place themselves in the center of the global phenomena which affect their well being. It could be stated that internationalization is a means towards developing the quality of higher education rather than an aim in itself (Qiang, 2003; de Wit, 2013).

### **3.3 Bologna process in Romania**

Romanian higher education system has faced many changes since the end of the communist regime. Following the disintegration of planned economy, domestic and foreign consultants, think-tanks, and specialists proposed various external models to restore the fading functions of education policies (Dobbins and Knill, 2009, p. 225). Among them are models promoting transnational mobility, development of human resources, market-oriented programs, setting standard packages to higher education, all supported by international organizations such as OECD and the World Bank. In the previous totalitarian social economic context the state played the role of the Leviathan, where universities were controlled by the state and their role was to deliver students ready to be integrated in the labor market as the ideological norms dictated. In the transition period, universities have been granted de facto autonomy, but with limited self-management rights as the government was reluctant to grant universities this responsibility because of their lack of experience. Many Romanian policymakers agree with the fact that market-oriented tendencies have been enhanced by the Bologna process, which responded to the massification of higher education in Romania (Marga, 2002). Nonetheless, the country developed its policies ‘to fit the European agenda towards convergence systems of higher education’, without fostering homogeneous institutional changes, which translated into problems of applying and internalizing the procedures and regulations associated with the Bologna strategy (Huisman and Van der Wende, 2004, p. 355).

The Bologna process was preceded by the Magna Charta Universitatum which was signed in 1288 by rectors of European Universities and includes a rhetoric emphasizing the pre-globalization period and the pre-knowledge economy (Kwiek, 2004, p. 762). Furthermore,

the document established that universities role is to ‘produce, examine, appraise and hand down culture by research and teaching’, ‘to attain universal knowledge’, and ‘to enrich students minds with the knowledge resulted from innovative research’ (Magna Charta Universitatum, 1988, p. 2). These traditional ideas on the role of universities are in a striking contrast with the language used today by the European Commission’s Communique on the role of universities as drivers of economic growth, as institutions engaged in global competitiveness, and as institutions that produce knowledge in order to equip students with the skills required on the labor market (European Commission, 2003, pp. 2-3). It is no longer possible for the universities to attain only the old traditional universal knowledge, as global events in the last decade have significantly changed the vocabulary used in the higher education debates of the Bologna process, of World Bank Policy papers and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. According to a World Bank paper, ‘the ability of a society to produce, select, adapt, commercialize, and use knowledge is critical for sustained economic growth and improved living standards’ (2002, p.7). Moreover, global discourse on the role of higher education has been incorporated and proliferated in the national discourse established by the Bologna documents, where special attention is given to the higher education institutions competitiveness and to social cohesion. Firstly, the Bologna process is ambivalent, in the sense that it contains ‘protectionist’ principles given by the idea of education as a public good and public responsibility, being financed by the national states; and the second contains ‘expansionist’ threads where higher education institutions attract foreign researchers and students. Secondly, it is considered that the Bologna process is a mechanism by which European states can act together against the incremental global threats, on the other hand that it is a mechanism for integrating the European higher education system, perceived as pressure from the global competition (Kwieck, 2004).

The Bologna process is considered a result of globalization and internationalization of higher education, and was devised as an international and national program whose objectives were set up legally by law, being followed by gradual implementation in universities of the main goals related to accreditation, quality assurance, changing curriculum, improving mobility, etc. Nevertheless, Romania has gone through a first wave of change before it, starting with the disintegration of the communist regime (Curaj et all, 2015). In 1990’s strong initiatives to increase university sovereignty and to decentralize decision making were pushed forward by

university professors, researchers, members of the Romanian Academy. This trend was encouraged by the neo-liberal ideology gaining ground in Romania that sought to disorganize institutions legitimized by the central planning administration of the communist regime. Subsequently, an analysis of the higher education system was initiated and published in 1992, followed by reforms which paved the way to the establishment of a quality assurance institution, enacted by law- The National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation- exercising its responsibility under the Romanian Parliament. In 1995 university autonomy became a de jure reality, however, the need for competent and skilled leadership professionals to run universities required further government initiatives. To tackle the aforementioned issue, the Reform of Higher Education and University Research was launched by the Romanian government and sustained by World Bank loans covering the period 1996-2001. Romanian universities were eligible to compete for the project as they had already achieved the status of accredited universities (Curaj et al, 2015).

Changes in the higher education institutional infrastructure have continued to be approached and encouraged by a vision encompassing cooperation and competition, which was promoted by the Bologna process. Universities autonomy was strengthened by the Bologna process, which exerted a normative pressure on Romanian higher education institutions. Romania signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999 when the country aligned to a set of common principles set by the European Higher Education Area such as:

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
2. Adoption of a system based on two cycles;
3. Establishment of a system of transferable credits as a means to promote student mobility;
4. Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance;
5. Promoting European dimensions in higher education, creating inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes, training and research (Dobbins, 2011).

European convergence tendencies invoke normative pressure which is softer than the coercive one through incorporating quality assurance practices at all university levels. Many scholars mention the idea that normative isomorphism as a general model is inapplicable to all countries subject to the Bologna process, instead it unites the elements common to more education systems which is a part of the recommendation policy in terms of higher education (Vlasceanu, 2011, p. 29). According to a study carried out on 28 Romanian technical universities and faculties, 62% of



them have managed to implement the Bologna Process in their institutions, while 26.9 % have only achieved the minimal standards, which are the compulsory ones (Todorescu et al, 2013, p. 445). The main barriers to the implementation were: lack of information, lack of operational policies, lack of involvement from the young in research projects, lack of recognition of the teaching staff, lack of a Quality Manual indicating the procedures for the elaboration of Bologna objectives.

The first generation of Bologna students graduated in 2008, as the reform came into practice in 2005. After 10 years of Bologna process in place, the mobility of students coming from disadvantaged social and economic background represents a crucial issue that the Romanian government failed to address. According to a survey, the main obstacle for student mobility is the lack of financial support or financing, 22% of the students surveyed identifying it as the main problem (Todorescu, 2012). More than this, in 14% of the universities around 80-100% of the students who benefited of a mobility experience needed to take exams upon their arrival in Romania, which indicates a high degree of incompatibility among universities. Added to these issues, the paradigm of education seen as a top-down approach where the focus is centered on delivering a huge volume of information instead of being concentrated on the students' needs represents a remnant of the communist regime which has not been successfully changed during 25 years of reforms in higher education. Student organizations at the local and national level have not played an important role in the decision making regarding the Bologna implementation process, their representation in the discussion councils being performed by other voices of the interest groups (Curaj et al, 2015). Therefore, it could be stated that welfare related issues, support services that would help students in their academic years are crucial aspects of an education system that strives to improve itself.

Romania has experienced important reforms associated with the Bologna strategy, starting from 2009 until 2013, whose effects are only seen today. The European Social Fund and the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) financed the research "Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making" with the intent to show the progress of education in Romania in the time frame 2012-2014. The project's objective was to develop the capacity of public administration in the policy making of higher education, as well as to target the good practices borrowed from the international education environment. The project expanded after the implementation of the Law of National Education (Law 1/2011), which

needed to be complemented by strategies and legislative documents. One of the visions included developing a prosperous, competitive and dynamic education system, contributing to decreasing the social and economic discrepancy between Romania and European Union member states (Ministry of Education, 2011). This goal implied increasing academic staff and student mobility, developing joint partnerships with other universities, improving institutional capacity building at the national level. Reports have suggested that this law has had a great impact on the internationalization policies undertaken by various higher education institutions (UEFSCDI, 2012:109). The European Union called for a national internationalization strategy tailored to the uniqueness and realities of different member countries, however, it emphasized common key areas that have to be incorporated in the national individual strategy (European Commission, 2013). Among them are:

1. Improving higher education by cooperation with worldwide education providers; establishing strategies leading to capacity building;
2. Internationalization of curricula;
3. Increasing students and academic staff mobility.

Additionally, the subjects analyzed in the project were significant for Romania's standing within international processes, such as EU2020 and the Bologna process. Authors like Wodak & Fairclough (2010) claimed that Bologna strategy was the precursor of the Europeanization process which ultimately led to internationalization. However, the higher education reform was perceived as an imperative by the Romanian officials, as they were afraid of the reactions of other European countries had the reforms not occurred. More than this, Romania committed to develop a higher education strategy for 2014-2020 time frame in line with the idea of internationalization of education.

### **3.3.1 Quality Assurance Institution**

One pillar in the development of higher education was the 1993 Law for diplomas recognition and accreditation of public and private education institutions. It was followed by the creation of agency Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) which fixed national standards for education providers. Next step in this process was the Law adopted in 1995, which granted independent rights to higher education institutions to implement and to create their own policies. However, the autonomy in regards to financial and personnel policies remained

limited, and negative consequences were reflected in the lack of adaptability of recruitment and in low absorption of teachers. In 2002 the law of differential financing was introduced by which universities were granted subsidies according to their qualitative status based on a set of indicators. A specific legislation was endorsed in 2004 to prepare the implementation of the Bologna process in Romanian higher education. A milestone in this development was Romania's participation as an active member in the European Higher Education Area, that required the adoption of Law 87 in 2006 related to quality assurance. Romania was obliged to enact the quality assurance law in 2005, when it had to comply with the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Geven et al., 2014 in Curaj). The law on quality assurance contains the following guide lines:

1. Methodological principles for quality assurance/accreditation in higher education;
2. External quality review procedures and criteria for institutions and programs level;
3. Quality assurance at institutional level (Internal QA guidelines);
4. Institutional arrangements involved in quality assurance (Curaj et al., 2014, p. 7).

Nonetheless, the education reforms started after 1990 had a strong resonance on the Romanian students, professors and higher education institutions, but they are still in need of coherent policies and improvements related to the quality of institutional units.

Quality assurance is one of the key elements that was officially included in the implementation of the Bologna process in Romania, therefore it needs detailed attention and analysis. An extensive definition of the quality assurance concept was provided by the ARACIS-the agency responsible for the application of education standards: a diversity of techniques used to evaluate the higher education system in order to improve its quality. Stakeholder communication and continuous self-improvement are the normative guidance of the quality assurance, where professional evaluators play a crucial role. All the guide lines have been subject to many debates, as universities failed to adapt and implement quality assurance because of the resistance among professors is too high (Paunescu, 2012). Empirical studies have shown that quality assurance policies and procedures have been dysfunctionally implemented in the higher education institutions. The main reason for this lies at both macro and micro level of analyses.

Firstly, it could be seen as a top down problem, as the Romanian policy environment is unstable and it has witnessed many changes in the last years. For a successful implementation of quality assurance procedures, there is a need for a set of rules that would allow a long-term planning and

a coherent formulation of the law. Conversely, academics become frustrated and confused as a result of the absence of sound legislation. Moreover, the institution in charge with controlling the quality assurance at the national level - ARACIS - highlights the procedures the academics have to comply to instead of focusing on performance indicators.

Secondly, the bottom-up problem is reflected in the behavior of academics who perceive the internal quality assurance procedure as a tool for external evaluation, thus, not compelling them to analyze and improve learning and teaching methods. Academics think of quality assurance as reporting externally the procedures the government created to control universities, rather than internalizing the quality culture they passively destroy by executing it in a ritualistic way (Curaj et al, 2015). The self-improvement task is not successfully accomplished due to the resistance of professors in the face of rigid and unstable procedures; and stakeholder communication is not entirely achieved as academic publishing is lacking the peer review complexity. Conceptual distinctions between the accountability and development of quality assurance are useful when analyzing who are the beneficiaries of the regulations and what policies are implemented at the university level.

As an example, government might perceive the changes in teaching strategies as an improvement, meanwhile the professors might have a more skeptical view on it. The quality assurance institution lacks the culture or the ethos needed to improve self-assessment and self-monitoring, as it was created as a top-down approach at the university level, determining conflicts between the existing professional relations, identities and the changes it entails (Shore and Wright, 2000).

When we look at the quality assurance institution through institutional analysis lenses it is understandable that it is a social norm in the education organizations; its transparency, responsibility and beneficiaries oriented values are shared and promoted not only at the national level, but resulting from the Bologna process policy documents and declarations. Internationalization of higher education and the European convergence policies imply soft normative pressure that the national states have to be weary of.

Quality assurance becomes institutionalized as a set of common practices, routines and meanings associated to them. By becoming an institution, it decreases uncertainty and improves stability given by the fact that it becomes legitimate in the context of the need of national and international recognition of it. The common structure referring to accreditation and periodical evaluations, and

the means by which they are met-external evaluation based on the same indicators and standards-lead to institutional homogenization.

One of the negative consequences mentioned in the institutional literature is the coercive isomorphism, referring to the compliance pressures of formal regulation coming from an authority in the social system. The Ministry of Education and the Romanian National Council of Academic Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (ARACIS) are organizations whose authority is to recognize the right of education service providers and of a study program unfolding education activities. Accreditation is the result of achieving a common set of standards being measured by unique external fixed compulsory indicators. However, there are no rewards for those service providers or programs that overcome the minimal level of standards, therefore, no rational organization will invest resources in non-profitable activities.

More than this, universities do not perceive the process of evaluation as something leading to development, but as something that has to be fulfilled in order to conform to the rules (ARACIS, 2010). Nonetheless, relying on external standards of evaluation and on unique indicators generated negative consequences reported by Brennan and Shah (2000). The authors concluded that external evaluation weakened the internal culture of fields of study, contributing to switching the distribution of power from the basic level of departments to the management, policies and regulations; strengthening the role of extrinsic values of economy and society in detriment to intrinsic or academic ones. Moreover, internal evaluations does not play an important part in quality assurance standards, instead, it is used as a preliminary, technical step in the process of accreditation and external evaluation.

The agency periodically evaluates the universities in order to check whether they respect the standards mandatory for granting them a good position in the education market. The main criteria and standards used for quality assurance are:

- Internal resources that create the premise for sustainable development of universities - institutional capacity.
- Universities results measuring important objectives such as teaching, research, strengthening relations with external institutions - educational efficacy;
- Quality management - as an internal institutional mechanism for constant improving the quality of provided education services.

The economic development rationale matches the institutional capacity as the latter cannot develop and improve unless its financial sustainability is assured for a long term period. To address this criteria, the faculty under study set the strategy to increase the number of students by 75% in the next four years and at the same time strengthen the notoriety indicators for a better promotion of the faculty. Even though it is a state-owned university, its orientation towards the commercial dimension of education services provision is considered to bring positive benefits and income to the faculty. For this reason the faculty strategic plan incorporated performance indicators associated with the commercial dimension (Faculty of Sociology, 2012-2016). Faculty reports for the last three years indicate a low rate of enrollment of students paying tuition fee, the number of international students being even lower. According to the National Alliance of Students' Organizations (2009), 70% of the students enrolled in the higher education system pay tuition fee and many of them are confused whether the payment reflects the quality of the education, whether it is the crossroad between supply and demand, or if it changes education into a business whose goals is the maximization of universities' profits (p.10). The faculty strategic plan is in accordance with the national and international plans in terms of internationalization of the higher education system. Therefore, it could be said that internationalization is a strategy whose action plans are materialized in the university operational plans and documents which set up the objectives for its institutional development capacity.

Educational efficacy is the second standard mentioned by ARACIS with regards to quality assurance, emphasizing the profound importance of research and production of scientific articles circulating at the national and international level, thus educational efficacy is related to research more than education. Comparing the strategic plan of the university with the criteria imposed by ARACIS in terms of evaluating the educational efficacy it is straightforward that the effective responsibility of the faculty is made manifest by the action plans. However, all the professors interviewed mentioned that the faculty has scarce financial resources to be invested in research projects, resulting in a tiresome struggle for them to find projects from outside private sources.

“Sometimes I have to invest more time and energy into the research projects funded by private companies than preparing my courses for the students” (Professor 6, Female).

Professors' opinions are confronted with the responses of decision-making staff, the latter portraying the academic institution in a much more positive way.

“A university priority is making sure the professors are given the necessary tools to develop

themselves by participating at conferences and seminars organized twice a year by the university[] all this having strong benefits on the students as well.”

Furthermore, when asked about the student centered learning they responded in a structured and systematic manner.

“Students are valuable individuals for our university and for the whole society, our task here is to teach them how to be useful people in the labor market, instilling [them] a set of practical skills relevant for coping with the present and future” (Professor 1, Female).

Their discourse simulates the official objectives found in the documents, with an evident accent on the economic dimension given by the labor market. Moreover, the increasing number of scientific publications by 500% in a three years period is one of the performance criteria established by the university, without being supported by an equivalent percentage increase in financing research projects (Zamfir, 2007).

Interviewees asked for solutions for improving the evaluation process in their faculty proposed different approaches. The professors identified institutional inertia as an important weak element for the difficulties with which any reform is implemented in the Romanian higher education. More than this, it is supplemented by the lack of an efficient dialogue between all the stakeholders involved. Conversely, the decision making staff claimed that the communication between students and professors is “based on even relationships, respect and the interest in learning from each other” ( Vice-Dean, Male).

Quality management becomes materialized through a set of procedures and strategies for quality assurance by which the academic institution demonstrates a constant improvement of its performances. Periodically assessing the professors is one of the most relevant criteria for quality management which was implemented at the faculty level, being followed by transparent information conveyed to the public. The professors interviewed stated that there is a lack of coherence between the evaluations carried out by the students and the further proposed improvements, in the sense that they are seldom required to discuss their academic evolution, as no official meetings are organized, so they continue to teach the courses; some mentioned they do it in a flexible way taking into consideration what students want, and the rest by engaging students in what they think is useful knowledge for them.

External quality assurance was established as an institution that creates transparency and builds trust among the beneficiaries of the higher education system, thus it entails common values

shared and internalized by the academic staff.

### **3.3.2 Institutional isomorphisms**

Powel and DiMaggio (1983, p. 150) identified three mechanisms of institutional change: coercive, mimetic, normative isomorphism, determining the homogenization of the organizational environment. More than this, cross-national institutional research has showed that 'isomorphic change occurs if existing institutions have been thoroughly discredited, morally or functionally, and, at the same time, if there is a powerful external actor who is able to enforce a new institutional design' (Beckert: 2010, p.153). Firstly, referring to the first part of the definition, it becomes clear that Romanian higher education institutions have been overburdened with dysfunctional operating activities after the collapse of the state-authority model (Olsen, 2007) dominated by a strong state control and limited autonomy. In the aftermath of the regime disintegration, existing institutions could not respond to the rapid transformation of social necessities imposed by the new economic and political order, resulting in uncertainties and confusion embracing the universities in terms of their function and role. Internal elements such as market-oriented curriculum, accountability, accreditation, quality assurance, student-centered learning, have been established to reinvigorate the institutional gaps made visible by comparing Romanian higher education with other European countries with sound institutional frameworks. Secondly, the last part of the definition embodies the Bologna strategy's impact on the development of regulations and procedures incorporated in the Romanian education. However, Bologna institutional design was enforced by government interests in aligning their policies to European Higher Education Area, which can not assure the success of the model unless the agents are socialized in the cognitive and normative frame leading to routinized academic behavior (Beckert, 2010, p. 156). At the same time, the cognitive frame is responsible for establishing a typical national template corresponding to the logic of institutional framework. In line with the logic of capitalism variety, institutions are surrounded by other institutions, complementing each other to fulfill an efficient objective. Coordination between the higher education institutions, the labor market, the quality assurance institution is very important in institutional reforms, accounting for the legitimate institutional arrangements are made more attractive to the decision making agents.

According to Vlasceanu (2011) the Romanian higher education system has experienced all three



types of institutional isomorphism as a result of rapid changes. This analytical framework explains the mechanisms through which national reforms apply international successful models which confer legitimacy and accountability to its policies. Coercive isomorphism could be illustrated empirically through the homogenization of standards granted by ARACIS to universities in the process of periodical assessment. This type of isomorphism is a result of formal and informal pressures exerted by the organizations and entities on which the organization implementing the change depends on. 'Highly rationalized myths' are coercive elements of the organizations, many of their procedures, policies, programs are imposed by the public opinion, by the education system, social prestige, laws (Rowan, 1991, p. 44). There is another class of isomorphism related to mimetism, occurring when universities tend to copy the structure and the procedures adopted by famous universities in an attempt to receive the accreditation from the issuing authority. Romanian private education system has undergone this kind of isomorphism when competition with public universities has increased. It could be explained by the uncertainty and risks faced by the private education institutions that required fast adjusting methods. As a result of this, private universities lacked the time and the inner resources to implement well-thought methodologies and curriculum tailored to the standardized rules established by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

More than this, Vlasceanu (2011) statement that the Bologna process established the platform for isomorphism practices determined by the incremental transnational linkages and communication seem to indicate that the challenges of this process prompted unintended consequences in terms of decoupling the intentions and the results of social actors involved. The vision to create a legitimate Europeanization of higher education based on tackling common threats imposed by massification, competitiveness, overshadowed the negative effects of isomorphism on the governance of higher education institutions. It can not be denied that Bologna became a platform for ideas and interests of national governments, university managers (Dobbins and Knill, 2009), facilitating the imitation of approaches seen as successful. Moreover, Romania as a transition country faces simultaneously dual tasks. Firstly, it has to confront with the old problems of shifting from elite to mass education in times of declining public funds, unlike other western countries whose higher education systems were heavily funded by nation states three decades ago - politics played a more important role than economics at that moment-, and secondly, it is

confronted with new problems emerging from the rapid homogenization, convergence models and towards achieving Bologna goals. Furthermore, Bologna acts as a pressure for national education systems to affirm their legitimacy under the threat of a competitive environment, without emphasizing the resistance the systems face when their institutional identities and beliefs are challenged. Two distinct structures evolve when we look at the factors influencing the institutional isomorphism: endogenous and exogenous elements. Exogenous ones imply the mimetic and normative isomorphism accepted as a result of paradigmatic need for reconstruction of institutional infrastructure in the post-communist Romania. Higher education in Romania epitomizes the model of absorption of exogenous isomorphism in a greater degree when compared to other post-totalitarian countries, such as Poland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, essentially due to the structure of universities and their policies inspired by the market-based education. Nevertheless, endogenous elements portrayed by the historical institutional memories have a long lasting effect on the interests and normative orientations of agents, which could determine the predisposition to change if analyzed as a factor in the higher education institution.

The author Seeleib-Kaiser (2008, p. 12) distinguishes between three types of analytic dimensions in policy implementation: discourse, institution and outcomes. Thus, witnessing a change in the policy discourse might not generate institutional changes. According to the recent reports about the Bologna implementation process, the guiding lines of the higher education reform have not been met entirely. One of the reasons consists of the top-down operationalisation of the Bologna process, where the government established the economic rationale as the most important pillar of this strategy. Even though the Bologna strategy was developed to unite common key elements to be implemented within the European Higher Education Area, the circumstances in Romania influenced the way the discourse and the implementation were carried out (Woodak and Fairclough, 2015, p. 33). Moreover, there is an inverse relationship between the outcomes and the discourse incorporated in the official documents. Lifelong learning represents one of the principles enacted by the Bologna reform and its underlying idea refers to developing social cohesion, quality of life and equal opportunities by setting the ground for a student centered education, by improving access and recognizing previous studies. However, the inefficient outcomes of this standard confirms the low support of this institutional infrastructure, which the Romanian government failed to address. Douglas North (1990, p. 3) defined institutions as rules

of the game for a society or constraints created by people for guiding individuals' interactions. Transferring this theoretical framework into higher education, it is obvious that administrative and education processes are seen as sets of rules, laws and procedures.

The logic of previous institutional guidelines have been replaced with the surge for scientific and standardized measuring of higher education productivity, thus with new rules that education organizations have to abide by. Results of an empirical analysis done by Paunescu et al. (2012) on perceptions and opinions of Romanian professors revealed that 81% from those questioned point to the fact that the main role of universities is teaching, and the material equipment of university and the services provided are the most important in terms of classifying universities. Moreover, research was considered important only by 51% of the interviewed professors, the gap between teachers' perceptions and Ministry of Education objective to increase scientific production of universities is significant (Idem, 2012). In support of these views comes the 2012 classification of higher education institutions, thus 12 universities are research intensive, 30 are teaching and research universities, and 48 teaching universities (Ministry of Education, 2012) This classification is representative for the shared values among professors and for the cognitive systems which substantiate practical knowledge and their behavior. Thus, gaps between the formal and the informal institutions are claimed to be the reason higher education has not reached the principles established by the Bologna reform. Successful institutional change depends on the adaptability and on the learning capacity of education organizations to the new formal rules. Conversely, the formal institutions are being decoupled and ritualized in the daily activities of education in the absence of internalizing formal institutions in terms of values shared and cognitive capacities to adjust to changes (Vlasceanu, 2011, pp. 26-28). On the same line, studies have revealed that the lack of inter organizational mobility is an institutionalized practice, as professors develop an affective organizational attachment which is considered the norm; thus the education organizations are perceived as a family which triggers loyalty to it (Vlasceanu, 2011, p. 71). As a result, this phenomenon explains why stability and a low degree of mobility dominates the higher education system in Romania, interposing between the institutional reforms whose objective is the modernization and the internationalization of higher education, and informal institutions governed by professors feelings and perceptions regarding education.

Institutional isomorphism is an outcome of the normative deterioration of institutions, that is

consistently represented in the Romanian higher education. All the interviewed professors emphasized the existence of ‘institutional diseases’ and ‘institutional inertia’ uprooting an efficient dialogue and decision making at the university level. Furthermore, the interviewees suggested a treatment for such a disease, opposing to the mimetic and coercive isomorphisms, stressing the crucial importance of reforms inspired from the ‘institutional diseases’ themselves, thus, from the internal problems. Reforms consisting of joint collaboration between researchers and the university was pointed as the first step in fighting institutional inertia affecting the faculty for years. This phase needs to be supplemented by ‘decent finance support’ that would permit professors to engage in steady and serious projects for enhancing the institutional functionality over time. At the same time, ‘social polarization’ was blamed for the institutional inertia, consisting of divergent views and approaches which endangers how the higher education reform is created and implemented and how the Bologna process objectives are met (Professor 3, Female).

Almost all of the academic staff interviewed downplayed the Bologna process in relation to the performance of the actual programs and curriculum. Previous to the Bologna three years Bachelor program, two years master followed by a PhD, the Romanian higher education system engaged students in a four year education program which included a holistic approach developing soft and hard skills for students. Nowadays, the faculty seems to struggle with including and excluding the “right and proper” courses at the bachelor level without repeating them at the master level (Professor 2, Female). The same interviewed professor indicated a level of confusion among students who do not understand the role of ten courses they have to attend during a semester, suggesting to reduce their number, but without having a negative effect on many academic staff who will lose their courses. Another professor underlined the utility of the confusion for students, contributing to “the acceptance and curiosity” about the multiple courses mandatory for a successful graduation. It was also explained that the Bologna process is a formal forum where European countries discuss higher education issues with no relevance for the problems the university is confronted with at the national level. Therefore, there is no common thinking regarding the way the faculty should improve the curriculum and include reforms in line with the Bologna process. Moreover, one of the main objectives of the Bologna strategy is student-centered learning, and half of the professors interviewed mentioned the difficulty with which this objective is achieved. Complaints over the lack of student-centered learning was

emphasized by some professors, which required a more holistic approach in teaching by looking at students as individuals who must acquire analytic skills and improve themselves as persons; instead of seeing them as a means in society and channeling all the attention to preparing students based on the standardized criteria in the higher education system.

More than this, the professors interviewed portrayed the higher education system as a business that provides economic benefits to some social-economic sectors, while the students are the ones who pay for it and keep it alive. This is more applicable for foreign students, which are imposed a higher tuition fee than domestic students. This is in line with the economic rationale of internationalization (Knight, 2004) of higher education, which consists of short-term benefits generated by tuition fees and money the students bring to support their studying expenses; and long-term economic advantages given by the students ideas and inputs convertible into financial gains. Market-based education was successfully embraced by the Romanian higher education context, overthrowing the stringent institutional remnants of the communist period. However, even though the elements of internationalization environment - mobility, immigration policy, loans for studies abroad, recognition of diplomas - were stipulated in the Romanian Government document (Curaj et al., 2015) they are not fully achieved, as the professors interviewed mentioned that mobility is not possible in the absence of support for exchange programs abroad.

As an example, one interviewee (Professor 1, Female) points to the insufficient number of professors capable of speaking a foreign language fluently, which hinders the university to engage in large-scale mobility programs. At the same time, even though the faculties are legally autonomous, they are in fact dependent on the financial support from the university, which in many cases fails to provide the minimum financial help for carrying out research programs. Furthermore, the faculty lacks the financial resources to invite foreign professors, to organize international conferences for improving the communication and exchange of knowledge and practices at the faculty level. All nine interviewed professors finance themselves if they want to attend and participate at conferences at home and abroad, in the spirit of the Bologna process mobility goals. Therefore, the faculty as an institution that adopted internationalization principles and the Bologna process fails to fulfill its responsibility. This situation was called 'the tragedy of the professors' by an interviewee complaining about the impossibility of aligning to the Bologna process because of the lack of financial resources, which many academic people struggle with (Professor 1, Female). The internationalization of the teaching process or the so called academic

rationale of internationalization, Knight (2004) and De Wit (2011) in terms of recruitment of international students and foreign professors, creating study programs in foreign languages does not match the practical occurrences in the faculty. In the last five years, the faculty has recruited only one foreign professor whose course was optional, and, as a result, the number of students attending it was not enough for the continuation in the coming years. The faculty managed to create a master program taught in English, but only two students out of 20 were international students. The professors recommended the development of indicators that would measure the impact of international activities for a better assessing of internationalization and of its utility in today's society.

Subsequently, coercive isomorphism in the faculty is represented by the professors' opinion on the internationalization pressures quantified in the number of international articles and research projects which contributes to the homogenization and standardization of the higher education systems. Interviewed professors do not advocate against this necessary practice for rational and pragmatic reasons, but they mention 'a relaxing of the chase for writing articles for abiding by the laws of internationalization practice and starting doing research which brings utility to the society'(Professor 4, Female).

Decision making staff points to the fact that the standards the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education "have to be followed by the university if it wants national and international recognition, even though the professors find it inconvenient" (The Dean, male). It could be said they hide the problems the teachers have behind the veil of institutional coercion, thus the problems are not formulated in a thorough manner needed to address the solutions.

Many authors have shown that professors resistance to changes in the organizational unit is illustrated by insufficient training, leadership and lack of a strong professional community. The teachers interviewed suggested that they have been briefly informed about the necessity of implementing the objectives of the Bologna process in the academic institutions, the goals came as a "must do requirements of the professional activity and not as present and future activities shared by all the teachers" (Professor 6, Female). Thus, the pressure from the management positions of the faculty required fast adjusting of internal strategies to change the attitudes and behavior leading to the acceptance of the new set of regulations, but they were never formulated and implemented as complements of the external coercive change.

To conclude, there are data showing the irregularities the Romanian higher education system

struggles with, starting from the micro level of social agents-professors-who traditionally reinforce the teaching mechanism and ignore the intentions of the Ministry of Education and ARACIS to implement external standards of evaluation based on the Bologna process.

### **3.3.3 New Public Management Paradigm**

New public management (NPM) is another imported reform model that has been implemented in the Romanian higher education institutions, having in common with the isomorphism the convergence principle, relying on the adoption of international best practices. According to Verger, New public management was termed as a global policy implemented differently around the world, due to the variation of local histories and politico-administrative institutions (Verger et al, 2012). At the same time, this policy paradigm is labeled as a trend in changing the administration and governance of the public sector, and it accounts for a series of reforms carried out in the 1980' and 1990' (Andersson, 2003). Given the lack of similarity of this model in all countries, Andersson (2003) suggests that it is not a consistent and coherent reform, but 'a group of ideas, variation on a theme or a cluster of ideas' (p.51). The main characteristics of the new public management are the following: 'proving significant importance for results control, increasing competition, effective implementation of performance measures and criteria, introducing discipline and control in using resources, adapting to the style of management from private sector' (Androniceanu, 2006, p. 93). However, Romanian higher education focused more on developing and implementing instruments for evaluating performance (Romanian Agency for Quality in Higher Education) while crucial public sector restructuring could not follow the same path. According to Rado (2001) reforms in transition countries need to embrace a strong structural reconfiguration of the entire systems, compared to western countries, where minor functional change is of more importance.

New Public Management in the Romanian higher education system is reflected by a strong focus on performance, rewards and punishments procedures. Education agencies such as ARACIS was created to establish the level of performance and the targets the universities are bound to achieve through assessing professor's academic activity. The public punishments come in the form of downgrading the academic institution, which leads to decreased reputation and demand of its programs on the market. As one interviewee confessed:

“The external evaluation is an important imposed criteria for our faculty and not for us (professors), even though it does not work as it should [], I must fill in the papers (no matter how confusing they are) regarding the evaluation as it is a part of the requirements as a professor, but for me it is more fulfilling to go in the class and teach’[], we have to execute the administrative tasks expected from us[], unfortunately, we are not only pedagogues and mentors now, but administrative staff also” (Professor 3, Female).

Another professor claimed that:

“Universities should be places where the academics develop into the direction of teaching, which is the most important duty of them” (Professor 4, Female).

It could be stated that there is a tension between the NPM and the academic culture, as professors are in the process of recreating their professional identities in the educational institution, as the social context has reconfigured their roles and status. This train of thought follows the institutional normative isomorphism, where the professors hold similar norms, such as the carriers of knowledge, which has to be passed down to students.

### **3.3.4 Capacity building**

Broadening the capacity building concept to the higher education institutions provides a better understanding of the quality assurance institution as a tool for gaining accountability through monitoring and evaluating the universities and the academic staff. Moreover, capacity building initiatives gain support if its agents perceive the deficiency of organizational performance as leading to loss in acquiring future human and financial benefits (Dill, 2000, pp. 214-218). Half of the respondents interviewed were skeptical towards the quality assurance practice as in evaluating their academic work it was taken into account the quantitative part, dismissing the qualitative which is the most important for the professors’ career. This view is supplemented by the fact that quality assurance procedures are accompanied by long-lasting and sometimes confusing requirements, which takes days to complete and brings frustrations that are channeled towards their pedagogical work interfering with the quality of their teaching. As a result, there is a vicious circle revolving around common issues felt by the interviewees that explains the resistance towards monitoring and evaluation, and by extension, resistance towards capacity building. This discourse is entrenched in the idea of deficient institutions incapable of facilitating the work, rather it aggravates the mode of carrying out the most urgent activities. A solution to this



problems comes from an interviewee:

“Changing the idea behind the professors evaluation, instead of seeing it as bureaucratic, impersonal step in our daily academic life, it should be baptized as a personalized and high-valued act that brings value to the social status of professors (Professor 6, Female).

Therefore, deducing from the respondent’s answer solid institutional reforms are needed not for the benefits it brings per se, but for a change in perception of the procedures the professors have to engage in. This finding reflects the crucial importance of the cultural and social values ingrained in the meaning the people assign to the acts they perform at their workplace. On the same line, capacity building at the institutional level that will guide professors actions in the direction imposed by the evaluation agencies is made difficult by personal reasons that do not form a “common mental coherence” (Professor 4, Female). Achieving a mutual understanding and interpretation of all the procedures is the key to accepting the evaluation techniques and accomplishing the institutional regulatory frameworks needed to improve the performance of the faculty at the national and international level.

Therefore, it could be implied that agents act in a rational way, as they will maximize the capacity building by discarding the elements generating bad performance with a further negative effect on the entire higher education system. This idea holds true if all decision making agents have full access to the information and can base their rational actions on it. A necessary precondition of the aforementioned is the existence of transparent and trustworthy institutions which stimulate a desirable behavior favorable for accepting reforms and changes in the higher education institutions. Such an institution has been embodied by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance (ARACIS) whose main role is to provide accountability to all universities competing on the market. However, the professors interviewed mentioned that faculty evaluation undertaken by ARACIS is not “clear and concise enough”, due to its “inconsistencies” related to the indicators classifying the higher education institutions. The results of academic research is one indicator used by ARACIS to evaluate the universities, but the respondents were engaged in few research projects financed by the university, compensating this situation with outside projects that professors found by themselves. Nevertheless, the faculty they teach in ranks first in ARACIS classification, which contradicts the experiences the interviewed professors have regarding the ‘comprehensiveness and objectivity’ of the evaluation criteria and process. In contrast, one of the decision-making personnel of the faculty emphasized the improvements the

faculty underwent in the last years, by pointing to the position the institution has among the others.

“There is a painstaking work involving the evaluation of our faculty, and we take all the effort needed to enhance it year by year by complying with the indicators set up by ARACIS’ (Vice-Dean, Male).

No professor has emphasized the strength of the Bologna process per se, on the contrary, only big weaknesses and challenges have been showed, especially by the older generation professors that can compare the pre-Bologna and the implemented Bologna reform. The decision-making staff (dean of the faculty and the vice-dean) has portrayed a positive image and future of the Bologna process. Nonetheless, they accentuated future improvements regarding students mobility and professors participation at international conferences, without giving a reasonable argument on how the university will generate it, in times of decreasing governmental funding.

The goals for institutional capacity building have been developed by ARACIS as a result of the Law 87 in 2006, setting the ground to complex and open criteria the universities have to comply with in order to be recognized as education institutions. The strategic plan of universities embodies the objectives and aims conducing to institutional capacity, and one of the most important aspects is the financial self-sufficiency on a short term, one year, and medium term, five years (ARACIS, 2010). However, one of the interviewee from a management position mentioned that the faculty has had difficult moments in financing itself in the last years, due to the decreasing numbers of students enrolling in both the three years Bachelor program and two years Master program. As a result the faculty adjusted by diversifying its programs, raised the number of students having to pay tuition fees and decreased the number of subsidized places.

Closely connected to the concept of capacity building is the institutional isomorphism, both rendered as policy options built upon efficient and successful models. Looking at the agents behavior through the prism of rational choice theory, it is not clear whether their decisions are triggered by self-interest only or by a complex system of social norms that direct their actions. The answer is not straightforward, as we need to look at the interconnection between social, political, cultural macro and micro systems influencing the decision-making, which is not the subject of this thesis, but could be explored in future research studies.

### **3.3.5 Students representation**

According to a study related to the quality of higher education in Romania, students have a negative view of the education system. Contrary to this, professors hold a more positive opinion on both the quality of students and of the universities. These divergences in perceptions are due to the professors' interest in presenting university institutions as desirable places where students gain valuable skills to integrate on the labor market. However, many students feel that the content taught does not correspond with the market demands (ARACIS, 2010). The students claim that education needs to be student centered, progressive and to embrace the uniqueness of every individual, only through these steps can the skills be transmitted and used for the social and individual benefits.

Regarding the involvement of students at all executive and decision making processes, Romanian higher education system needs to respect the principles of students' representation: openness, independence, representation and democracy that are inspired from the European higher education area guidelines. In the landscape of representative students' structures there are methods used to direct students voices as an echo of some interests that do not benefit this social group. Such methods include systematic mass media discourses from the academic community and government officials:

“...distorting the image of students and portraying it in a negative way[...]; they think that today's generation of students lacks the internal and motivational force to represent the core issues falling under their responsibility[...]; these social actors impose their own viewpoint on what are the ardent problems of students without knowing exactly the core foundations of them” ( Students' Association President).

The summit of European Ministers at Leuven in 2009 signaled the crucial importance of the social dimension in the higher education system, which failed to be incorporated in the Romanian national and institutional regulations. The reason for this could be the lack of representation of students at crucial decision-making meetings (QAR, 2010). The social dimension is a priority that aims at strengthening the education environment, removing the barriers confining the access of students to the opportunities conducive to their successful graduation; creating the economic conditions favorable for all students regardless of social economic background. The social dimension of education was emphasized by the Students' Association President, mentioning that we face the situation when “the students are investing more in education, meanwhile the state investments in education dropped consistently affecting the enrollment rates of students in

universities, having a negative impact on the overall system”.

In addition, the student suggested that “the government has the responsibility to invest in the students’ future, otherwise, Romania will lose good students that opt out for an education outside their country”.

Incorporating these responses in a bigger picture, it is clear that the message comes as a threat addressed to the Romanian government to improve the social dimension of higher education as it is stipulated by the European Bologna objectives.

A second theme of discussion with the Students’ Association president focused on the principle of student centered learning, which is considered one of the most important pillars of a modern higher education. The term ‘student centered learning’ encapsulates the concept of choosing the education path the students are entitled to, starting from learning results the students want to achieve depending on their own interests and personal skills; from an active participation of students at the decision-making, as well as transforming the relation between professors and students into a collaborative one by which the power is split equally. Currently, the Romanian higher education system approaches the student centered learning in a more formal and theoretical way, even though the general tendency is giving a solid importance to this action line of the Bologna Process in the future. As the interviewed student puts it: “All the regulations and the activities created are just premises of the education centered on us [students] and are not at all a guarantee of its achievement’.

Moreover, it was pointed out a big difference between the older generation of professors and the younger generation in terms of their teaching techniques and communication. Old generation professors have been labeled as:

“individuals who depict students as recipients of pure information, without considering that feedback given to us is the most useful tool to understand what was mistaken, and in this way, understand and learn” (Students’ Association President).

In line with this train of thought, the student added that the curriculum is not adapted to the needs of students and the professors teach only what is covered by the planned lecture, followed by a “sterile evaluation of the learned knowledge”.

Conversely, young professors (under 40) are capable of ‘motivating and capturing our attention in multiple ways by making us work in groups, getting us involved in fieldwork projects that help us

develop more skills at the same time’.

Therefore, it could be stated that the generation gap within an academic facility has huge implications on the smoothness and precision with which the reforms are successfully implemented. Romanian higher education fails to address a long-term vision on the direction it should take, which materializes in the reluctance to innovation and change conveyed by older professors and experienced by students in a negative way.

The finality of the Romanian higher education system reforms needs to be based on the transition from the paradigm of teaching to the paradigm of education centered on students. To conclude, from the point of view of the students - as main stakeholders of the higher education system- student centered learning, as one of the objectives and priorities of the Bologna process were not properly implemented at the faculty level. As has been shown, decision-making power and student-centered learning problems have been identified as crucial for understanding why the Bologna official priorities have not been fulfilled. Moreover, the social dimension, so important for all the students’ participation at the higher education level, is not found in the faculty objectives, instead it is a value promoted by the ethos approach of the internationalization process.

## **Conclusions and Discussion**

The thesis has analyzed and explored the internationalization of Romanian higher education, focusing on the Bologna process as a result of the internationalization phenomena. The paper addressed three elementary research questions:

### *1. What are the rationale behind the internationalization of Romanian higher education?*

Internationalization of higher education is recognized as a response of the countries to the impact of globalization. Integrating the internationalization process at the institutional level - universities - was de jure achieved as a result of the education laws the Romanian Ministry of Education enacted and implemented under the rhetoric of structural reforms of the system following the post-communist period. However, internationalization dimensions are not seriously reflected in the Romanian formal higher education documents; they emphasize the economic rationale and ignore other dimensions - political, cultural, and academic - that were identified as important for the higher education positioning at the international level.

The economic dimension is more prevalent in the Romanian higher education official documents than other dimensions and it is manifested through the contribution the internationalization brings to the enhancement of human resources and skills, making the country capable of competing with other nations. An important asset is the foreign students that come to study in Romania, and for whom the tuition fees are much higher and they can be proposed fees not established by law or by the official university institution documents. Most obviously, there is a discrepancy between the aims of achieving a high quality of education or the academic rationale and the tendencies to extend higher education to the international export markets. The primary function of a university is to provide knowledge complemented by research, mobility of students, which lead to the cultural and academic motives behind internationalization. However, the financial resources needed for developing the quality of the academic staff, research and students are insufficient, leaving Romanian higher education system open to criticism and low world ranking.

GATS in Romanian higher education threatens to intensify social inequalities, especially in a country where students' access to education is dependent on the parents' income, with a lacking infrastructure of taking bank loans. The official discourse of the European Common Higher Education Area acknowledges the roles the universities have as determinants of the economic growth and economic competitiveness of the regions, by providing well-trained individuals for the knowledge driven economy, without resorting to the principles that dominated the rhetoric of universities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a prerequisite of the Humboldt model in higher education systems (Kwiek, 2004, pp. 760-762).

## *2. How has the Bologna process been implemented at the institutional level?*

The Bologna process has received many negative criticisms due to the lack of integrative functions of its main institutions, the quality assurance. Firstly, ARACIS, the main governmental agency for evaluating the quality of higher education has been created as a result of the Bologna process in order to assure the universities accomplish the objectives and goals necessary for their survival on the market. However, the unintended consequences of this institution translate into the mimetic and coercive isomorphisms, with universities copying the operational and strategic plans between themselves to avoid punishments in the form of downgrading the academic institutions, meaning they will lose their legal status as education and research institutions. More than this, the capacity building being defined as initiatives leading to institutional reforms, human

resources development and organizational enhancement is locked in a state of ‘institutional inertia and disease’, postponing the production and the maximization of the academic institution potential. Secondly, the curriculum organized by the model of three years of Bachelor, two of Masters and three of PhD left professors discontent and confused, as many of those interviewed suggested that Masters’ programs repeat at a larger scale the same courses which are compulsory at the Bachelor level.

Thirdly, the New Public Management principles have been officially enforced to complement the Bologna process reform, even though the performance criteria, the importance of results control were not openly received by the professors, perceiving them as pure technical aspects not contributing to the quality of teaching and strengthening the relationships between professors, as the owners of knowledge, and the students, as the receivers. More than this, the New Public Management paradigm might help the development of education institutions and the Bologna process implementation if the academic staff will be thoroughly trained into accepting it.

### *3. How did the academic community internalize the top-down approach of the Bologna strategy?*

The qualitative research revealed that the professors have not internalized entirely the principles established by the Romanian education law, such as quality assurance, student centered learning and the curriculum. The reasons behind this are manifold, but the most manifested ones come from the professors’ perception of the utility and necessity of them in the academic institution, and of the attachment to the old way of teaching and of perceiving the education system.

The European Commission along with the national governments and the rectors of the universities have agreed to implement the Bologna requirements starting from 2005, but the academic staff seemed to be not very determined to implement the objectives behind the Bologna process because this social group is not aware of the consequences the change might bring. Therefore, the implementation issues of the Bologna strategy at the institutional level requires special attention, as understanding them will determine the difference between a successful implementation and a dysfunctional one. More than this, policy implementation is done by interest groups, lobby groups, ignoring the specialists, stakeholders, and experts opinion in this area. This procedure is a reminiscent of the historical Napoleonic top-down approach in

education (Scott, 2002:141), with only regulations and laws establishing the speed of reforms. An important stakeholder mentioned by the Bologna objectives are the students, which are not entirely represented in the university's committees and lack decision making power. The student's representative responses on the quality of teaching in the university depends on the generational differences among professors. If older generation of professors emphasize the importance of teaching for the development of students, the younger ones adopt more modern approaches, treating students as equals and as involved parties in the learning process. The old generation of professors were more likely to complain about the evaluation of their performances by the students and by other colleagues, contending they know their job (teaching) and should not waste their time with redundant administrative tasks. This attitude represents an obstacle in the assimilation and internalization of the Bologna objectives, with negative consequences on the experiences of the students and on the positioning the university has among other academic institutions. As shown in this paper, the top-down approach in a Romanian higher education institution faces big challenges among the academic staff, as the status quo is preferred to changes and reforms. The Bologna process has not been successfully internalized. Even though Romanian political actors translated the goals into regulations and laws, the institutional infrastructure failed to adapt to the legal frameworks, one of the reasons being the lack of thorough guidance directed to the affected social actors involved in the process (Singer et al, 2006).

### **Future research**

Education policy is affected not only by internationalization dimensions, but also by past decisions embedded in the historical context. It is also contended that organizational resistance to reforms is supported by a common set of values, norms, beliefs, and practices implanted by the cultural institutions such as: family, markets, democracy, bureaucracy, professions, and religion (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2012, p. 176). Future studies on the reforms and institutional changes in the higher education system should take into consideration these six factors. Identifying the factors leading to the resistance of reforms could transform the institutional and professors' values, conducting to more satisfaction and openness to change; at the same time, directing the financial resources in productive and useful manner.



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## **Appendix 1: Interview Guide**

Consent from all the interviewed people was obtained before the interview.

All interviews were voice - recorded obtaining the interviewee agreement.

The interviews were semi-structured, following the questions bellow and arising new questions from the answers received.

### Management decision-makers

1. How do you see the Bologna strategy for Romanian higher education? How do you think it affects the social agents included by it?
2. How do you tackle institutional uncertainties? Do you look for internal or external solutions?
3. How does the management team communicate with the rest of the academic staff?
4. In what degree does the Bologna strategy contribute to student's development? What are the main skills the students learn?
5. What are the weaknesses/strengths of Bologna strategy implementation?
6. What is the central university priority?
7. Who are the stakeholders actively participating at the decision-making processes?
8. Does all academic staff follow the goals set up by Bologna? How do you manage the situation when professors refuse to accept the curriculum or the evaluation?
9. How does the quality assurance institution function at the university level?
10. How does the quality management department make sure that evaluations are carried out?
11. How do the professors perceive internal and external evaluation of their academic work?
12. Do the teachers comply with the curriculum they have to follow?
13. What are the main guidelines the professors have to follow in their teaching process?

### Professors

14. How did the transition to Bologna process change your academic work? (in terms of curriculum, mobility, research). What do you feel you need to change?

15. What do you think of internal academic changes determined by the government decisions?  
What do other professors think of it?
16. What are the challenges of the Bologna strategy in this university? How are you planning to approach them?
17. What are your suggestions for improving the actual Bologna strategy?
18. In what way do you communicate with other professors when a faculty decision needs to be taken? Do you reach consensus easily? Could you please describe an example when the opinions differed?
19. How do you communicate with other stakeholders? Are students involved when decisions are taken? Are student's feedback taken into account when the professors are evaluated?
20. What is the role of the external/internal evaluation process in the university?
21. What are the regulations regarding the quality assurance you are aware of? How do you find them?
22. How do other professors perceive the evaluations?
23. How do the evaluations affect your academic career?
24. If you had to change the evaluation procedures, what would you exclude and include?
25. What do you value the most in the university environment you are working in?

#### Students Representative

26. How do you communicate with the professors?
27. How is the evaluation of professors carried out among students?
28. How do the students perceive the university curricula?
29. What are the students expectations from the professors and the curricula?
30. How do the students make their voiced heard?

## Appendix 2

The following information will contain the interviewees background in order to present the context. They are all professors at the faculty of Sociology in Bucharest. Apart from professors I interviewed the students representative also, in order to gain understanding of the student status in the analyzed academic institution.

Interviewed professor 1: Female, 50 years old, Sociology History professor, she has been a professor for 20 years.

Interviewed professor 2: Female, 58 years old, Research Methods professor, she has been teaching for 30 years.

Interviewed professor 3: Female, 40 years old, Social Policies professor and has been a professor at this university for 13 years.

Interviewed professor 4: Female, 39 years old, Human Resources professor, has been teaching for 11 years,

Interviewed professor 5: Male, 43 years old, Social Psychology professor, has been teaching for 15 years.

Interviewed professor 6: Female, 38 years old, Research Methods professor, has been teaching for 11 years.

Interviewed professor 7: Female, 62 years old, Sociology of Education professor, has been a professor for 30 years.

Dean of the Faculty: Male, 52 years old, professor of Organizational Behavior and Strategic Management, has been teaching for 15 years.

Vice-Dean of the Faculty: Male, 49 years old, Social Policies and Deviance professor, has been teaching for 12 years.

Students representative: Female, 24 years old.

## Appendix 3

**Table 1 The number of Romanian graduates in the last 12 years**

Year	Number of graduates
2001	93.467
2002	103.402
2003	110.533
2004	108.475
2005	112.244
2006	125.499
2007	232.885
2008	214.826
2009	191.291
2010	186.900
2011	136.671
2012	111.028

*Sources: Adapted from National Statistics Institute*

**Table 2 The budget of the University of Bucharest over 6 years.**

Year	Budget
2005	41.760.579 Euro
2011	88.711.695 Euro
2012	62.894.472 Euro
2013	72.369.313 Euro
2014	60.196.018 Euro

*Sources: University of Bucharest (2014)*

The university comprises 19 state-owned faculties. There is no data on individual faculties budget. For unknown reason no budget data could be found for the 2005-2011 academic years. Moreover, no specific data indicate the amount of money spent on research.

**Table 3 Graduate number over years 2001-2002 ( pre Bologna process) compared to 2009-2010 (post Bologna process).**

Year	Economy graduates	Law graduates	Political science graduates	Pedagogy students	Humanities graduates	Administrative studies graduates
2001-2002	22.887	10.362	1000	2.404	6.803	986

2009-2010	72.641	17.954	13.600	20.647	10.705	13.625
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Sources: Adapted from National Statistics Institute (2011)

There is no public representative statistic regarding the number of graduates of the above six programs indicating their insertion on the labor market. I included these six study areas because of the big difference between the number of graduates in 2001-2002 and 2009-2010. One of the explanation has its roots in the communist regime preference for hard sciences in the detriment of the soft ones, therefore, only after the collapse of the regime could the above mentioned study areas increase their visibility.

**Table 4 Insertion rate of the Sociology graduates over time. Older data could not be found.**

Graduation year	Graduates number	Contacted graduates	Employed in the study area
2009	650	130	69 (53,08%)
2010	676	139	72 (51,80%)
2011	553	115	62 (53,91%)
2012	456	96	62 (64,58%)
2013	307	65	42 (64,62%)

Sources: Adapted from Ministry of Education (2014)

**Table 5 Students admitted for Masters program in 2015**

Area of study	Study programs	Number of students	
		State funded places	Student funded places (tuition fees)
Sociology	Social Deviance and Criminality	30	45
Sociology	Human Resources Management	35	40
Sociology	The Sociology of Consumption and Marketing	30	45
Sociology	Advanced Sociological Research	15	60

s: Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Bucharest (2015)

Source

**Table 6 Students admitted Bachelors program at the Faculty of Sociology in 2015**

Area of study	Bachelor level	Study programs	Number of students	
			State funded places	Students funded places (tuition fees)
Social sciences and politics	Sociology	Anthropology	27	23
	Sociology	Human Resources	43	77
	Sociology	Sociology	130	205

Sources: Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Bucharest

**Figure 7 Organizational chart of the Faculty of Sociology**

