

# PRACTICE MODELS AND PUBLIC POLICIES IN THE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Abstract

Since the end of the last century, there have been lots of analyses on the evolution of various basic types of structures of authority and academic governance patterns, public policies and practice models, all together in search of the most effective formula for adapting the higher education institutions to the new educational requirements and trends of the global market, characterized by increasing competition. In this context, our paper provides a succinct analysis of the worldwide trends in the governance and management of higher education with an emphasis on Europe and on the evolution of the Romanian universities, in the context of the public policies promoted during time.

## **1. General background**

In the context of the knowledge society, higher education tends to be redefined as a service with market value, which can be sold or purchased in trade. Thus, many researchers consider that academic education begins to lose its privileged status of public good that has to be protected because of its strategic contribution to the welfare of the community and is increasingly transformed into a public service, subject to the logic and unforgiving discipline of the free market, without the institutional and cultural protection enjoyed in the past (Deem, 2006; Fletcher, 2007; Rochford, 2008). This ontological metamorphosis brings along certain consequences, more or less appreciated, especially in management and institutional governance.

Since the end of the last century, there have been lots of analyses on the evolution of various basic types of structures of authority and academic governance patterns, all together in search of the most effective formula for adapting the higher education institutions to the new educational requirements and trends of the global market, characterized by ever increasing competition (Clark, 1998; Deem, 1998; Marginson and Considine, 2000).

The high level of this competition is reflected in many of the international academic rankings. Although the relevance of these rankings of universities worldwide has become the subject of a heated international debate, we cannot ignore that no Romanian university is part of the top 500, in any of the widely recognized and appreciated international academic rankings (Almășan and Reinhardt, 2008, p. 113).

In Romania, before December 1989, the higher education system (HES) was a centralized and rigid one. After the fall of communism, through a continuous process of reforms, the decision-makers attempted to synchronize, at least at the legislation level, the Romanian higher education with the European one, a synchronization that seems to have a growing pace in the recent years (Pricopie, 2008, pp. 4-9). However, unlike the Western European, American, Japanese or Australian universities, the Romanian higher education institutions do not have a tradition in terms of management and academic governance.

In this context, the paper provides a succinct analysis of the worldwide trends in the governance and management of higher education with an emphasis on Europe and on the evolution of the Romanian universities, in the context of the public policies promoted during time.

## **2. Management and Governance – near synonyms or complementarities?**

Often, the terms *management* and *governance* are used as relatively synonyms and inter-changeable, theorists suggesting that the differences are so fluid in terms of scope that maybe a strict distinction between the terms is not necessary (Meek, 2003, pp 1-3; Lynn Jr., 2006, pp. 10-12). However, sometimes they are used in specific contexts in which their conceptual distinction is clearly needed (Baldwin and Leslie, 2001; Tierney and Minor, 2003; Goedegebuure and Hayden, 2007).

From another perspective, for Marginson and Considine (2000, pp. 28-32), *management*, *leadership* and *administration* are only the components of *governance*,

seen as a relational concept. Gallagher (2001, p. 14) sees *governance* as a whole structure of relationships and networking built to ensure organizational consistency, implementation of policies and strategies, plans and decisions, while providing their integrity, probity and efficiency. *Leadership* consists in identifying opportunities and establishing strategic directions, the *management* is meant to achieve the objectives set by allocating responsibilities and resources and monitoring their efficiency and effectiveness, while the *administration* has to implement approved procedures and systems used to achieve the results set. For Edwards (2000, p. 5), *governance* is not what organizations do, but the way they do their job, how the organizations are coordinated, as well as the processes and structures that organizations put to use in order to follow their mission.

Seen as a mix of cultural, organizational and managerial interventions, the *new managerialism* is a new model for the higher education institutional order in Europe, an alternative to the model launched and implemented in the post-war era – the traditional compromise between corporate bureaucracy and professional associations (Jary and Parker, 1998; Smith and Webster, 1997). The sustainable relationship between management control and professional autonomy of academics, characteristic for the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is known as professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 104).

With the emergence of new pressures, including the need to reduce costs and administrative expenditures and the increasing demand for more high quality academic services (McNay, 2006, pp. 7-9), in parallel with the rise of new change and development-generating forces in higher education – entrepreneurship, massification, internationalization and globalization – it becomes imperative to set clear directions and strategies and to design and build structures to enable the achievement of these strategies not only for growth, but especially for institutional survival (Kirp, 2002; Burgan, 2004).

As for the academic governance, like any relatively new concept, with the semantic range still fluid and with a definition in course of crystallization, the literature supports a wide range of meanings of the term. A significant number of these definitions are concerned with the delimitation of the concept of university governance from related concepts such as *leadership*, *administration* or *management*. Thus, many theorists of the field (Edwards, 2000; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Gallagher, 2001) believe that governance in universities must be intended to grow the values within the universities, to set resource allocation and the functioning of the decision-making process, as well as to ensure the following of the organizational mission and the achievement of its goals. However, the academic governance includes patterns of authority and hierarchies, along with the academic networking and the relations of the universities with other academics, with the government, with the business and with the community they are part of.

Although the literature and research in higher education pays attention to the trend of distancing of many contemporary universities from the numerous and complex

models of traditional governance, the same literature indicates that this movement for change is not happening on a common or clearly drawn direction, but, instead, it includes models which differ considerably from country to country, both in content and in intensity and duration.

National systems differ substantially in the organization of governance in universities. The literature provides references for the collegiate model, the bureaucratic model (Millett 1978; Dill, 1999), the political model (Baldrige, 1971), the model of organized anarchy (Cohen and March, 1974) and the professional model (Mintzberg, 1979).

Some authors prefer, however, another classification of the types of governance. Thus, Harman (1992) proposes three main types of national structures of authority and university management: the continental system, the British system, and the American system. In the continental model of governance, authority is distributed between the faculty and the government bureaucracy, while the British model distributes authority between faculty and institutional boards. The U.S. model is similar to the British one, with the difference that the faculty has a lower authority, the balance of power tilting more toward the boards and the presidents of universities.

Also, it is clear that leadership plays a critical role in the American universities, just as it does in other social institutions. If we examine carefully any major accomplishment of a university – the quality of its faculty and students, the excellence of a program, its impact on society – invariably we will find a committed, forceful, visionary, and effective leader. Leadership is dispersed throughout academic institutions, through department chair and program directors, deans and executive officers, and influential leaders of the faculty and the student body. However, in most institutions, both the responsibility and authority of leadership flow from the top of the organizational pyramid, from the president and the governing board of the university (Duderstadt, 2000, p. 249). These conclusions belong to J. Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, one of the most prestigious American universities.

The literature of the last two decades added to this list other types of governance, such as the entrepreneurial model (Clark, 1998), the model of the service-oriented university (Tjeldvoll, 2002), the corporate university model (Marginson and Considine, 2000) and the managerial university (Deem, 1998).

Thus, governance is generally seen as a dynamic interaction of groups and sub-systems acting at different levels in the HES and linking this system as a whole to the external environment – government, the business sector, community, etc.

### **3. European trends and perspectives**

The measurement, evaluation and the increased efficiency of universities are considered a priority by almost all European governments, in recent years. The efficiency of an academic system can be defined, for example, by several indicators, such as decreased academic abandonment, increased number of enrolled students and graduates, or by the shortening of the actual time of graduation in relation to the legal time (Johnes and Taylor, 1990, pp. 48-53).

The state plays a significant role in setting strategic objectives, thus limiting the autonomy of the university. The government assesses the use of public resources in relation with the goals achieved. The results obtained by public institutions are, therefore, subject to the review, assessment and control of the state. In economic terms, this approach falls within the concept of *quasi-market*. Bartlett and Le Grand (1993, pp. 29-34) have defined some of the characteristics necessary for the existence of quasi-markets in a particular sector. In the suppliers' zone, manufacturers must be accredited according to the rules and conditions imposed by the government, otherwise their access to the market or to state funding is limited. Furthermore, within this model, the producers' objective is not that of maximizing economic value, as educational institutions are mostly nonprofit. In the demand area, the purchasing power is influenced not only by the tuition fees but also by the public subsidies that cover some or all student costs (using *per capita* funding systems, vouchers, student loans, etc.).

To understand the trend of the European higher education systems to turn to quasi-markets, some of the most significant approaches in this field in Europe will be briefly reviewed.

In the UK, universities enjoy almost complete autonomy, both in teaching and in recruiting faculty (Pilbeam, 2006). In France, the state imposes faculty employment policies and the implementation of new academic programs is subject to strict public control (Agasisti and Catalano, 2006, p. 251). In Germany, the Coordination Council of the Länder Ministries draws up guidelines for the organization of university curricula and programs of study. Financial autonomy is also limited, the financing of academic programs from the state budget being done through clearly established procedures. However, recently, most Länder have started to experiment with methods of financing which allow managerial autonomy of universities (CHEPS, 2006).

Public funding of higher education is prevalent in European countries (85% in France, 91% in Germany, 75% in Spain) (OECD, 2005). Similarly, in the UK, the funding from the state budget covers the majority of academic training and research, but there are important private money involved (35%), especially tuition fees paid by students and the funding/sponsorship from businesses and donors (HEFCE, 2004). Limiting public financing in several countries in recent years led to higher levels of self-financing through tuition fees and the sale of services.

In the European area of higher education the state acts as a regulator of the market, by establishing quality standards and the tuition fees framework. Thus, in the UK, Italy and France the quality of higher education is assessed by central agencies, while in Germany and Spain these agencies exist at regional level (Agasisti and Catalano, 2006, p. 254). As for the tuition fees, the French state sets the tuition fees for each field of study, differentiated by type of programs, in Germany the Länder establishes the academic tuition fees, while in the UK the government sets maximum annual tuition fees (Orr, 2005; Orr *et al.*, 2007).

Even though there are many similarities at the European level in using quasi-market models in the academic area, in terms of university autonomy there are two distinct models: the Anglo-Saxon and the continental one. They are differentiated mainly by the degree of involvement of government in regulating and establishing the quality framework, including recruitment and remuneration of teachers. The Anglo-Saxon model stands for a much greater university autonomy in the decision-making system and in implementing the educational offers and programs, while in the continental model the state is more involved in these issues, sometimes dictating precise rules regarding the educational offer, the research programs and the overall financing.

#### **4. Academic management in the Romanian universities**

According to legislation, the HES contains all accredited institutions of higher education, regardless of their structure, founders and profiles. Before 1989, in Romania there were two types of higher education institutions: colleges and universities. The first type of institutions offered three-year programs, and they were dedicated to teaching and learning. The second type of institutions offered four/five-year programs, and they promoted both teaching and research. Immediately after the political earthquake in December 1989, all colleges became universities by a governmental decision. This decision had three major consequences: 1) a sudden dramatic change in the magnitude of HES, 2) a massification of higher education, and 3) the promotion on academic management positions of many professors without any managerial skills and experience (Brătianu, 2008). These major consequences generated a second level of numerous other outcomes with negative end-effects.

Immediately after December 1989 Romania entered a transition period characterized by many political, legislative, economical and social changes. According to the boundary value theory, all of these changes put a lot of pressure on the HES to change and to adapt itself to the new social requirements (Burnes, 1996; Darwin, Johnson and McAuley, 2002). Actually, there were three major changes needed: adaptation to the new market economy, integration in the European Area of Higher education through the Bologna Process, and improvement of leadership and academic management to meet the challenges of the knowledge society (Marga, 2000; Marga, 2009). As Jongbloed, Maassen and Neave (1999, p. 3) remarked: “given its traditional role in handling, transfer and production of knowledge, it is obvious that higher education is (or at least should be) a core social institution in our expanding knowledge and information society. If they fully want to live up to their role, higher education institutions will have to adapt to the needs of the knowledge and information society. The question is, whether the traditional strong adaptive power of higher education institutions is capable of this”.

The new *Law of Education* (1995) played an important role in defining for the first time the concept of *university autonomy*, and in establishing the main *functional structures* for universities and their management. In the same time, this law defines the new role of the Ministry of Education as a policy maker. However, it is a long

way from the over-centralized HES we had before 1989, toward a decentralized system with autonomous universities. An important moment in the HES reform was during the mandate of Andrei Marga (the Minister of National Education from 1997 to 2000), when the *Law of education* has been drastically improved. At least two new perspectives should be mentioned: changing the financing mechanism of universities, based on the equivalent student concept, and implementing strategic management in HES and universities. It is interesting to remark the fact that implementing strategic management lead to visible changes in the attitudes of deans and rectors, from a passive and reactive attitude to an active and pro-active behavior. Also, the election procedures now request that each candidate to a leading position in the university's functional structure (i.e. head of department, dean of faculty, rector) present and defend a strategic vision for the development of the department, faculty or university, and to construct a strategic plan as a support for this possible development (Brătianu, 2002). This new requirement contributed directly to increase the leadership dimension in the university management, since it is related to the vision capability of the leader. Although these changes have a rather long time frame, their general effect demonstrated a significant departure from the former passive administration model used for the university management.

Even ten years after this triggering change, there are still some inertial forces in the field, which demonstrates the limited absorptive capacity of change in HES. In the same time, we should notice that the new ministerial team that came after 2000 slowed down the pace of reform, abnormally increasing the change process time frame.

## **5. Leadership and governance in the Romanian universities**

Although changes made in the *Law of education* have been essential for HES, they were not sufficient for creating a new culture able to promote leadership and governance. Leadership is a quite new aspect of the university management which is strongly related to strategic management, and governance represents only a debatable concept which might be implemented in the near future. It shouldn't come as a surprise, since during socialism the HES was over-centralized and the universities played only a reactive role. All the main decisions concerning the life of universities were taken at the level of the Ministry of Education. There was no real autonomy and no real management. There was only a bureaucratic administration, and rectors without any real decision power in managing their universities. Even the tiniest change in a university program, for example the introduction of a new course, had to be approved at the ministry level. However, using the psychological halo effect, the socialism regime created the illusion of an academic leadership by appointing as rectors professors with a high scientific visibility and known to have an obedient attitude toward the political leaders. It was an illusion because a good professor in his/her own field is not necessarily a good manager or leader. Actually, there was no need for good leaders, since good leaders could not be obedient people by the very nature of leadership. Also, there was no intention to develop leadership for the non-

autonomous universities, and no intention of creating autonomous universities in the highly centralized HES.

The transition process in our economy induced a real need for changing the organizational culture of all universities, so that it could become a change driver instead of an inertial force. Yet, many rectors entered the political arena and some of them became even members of the Parliament. In this situation, politics could not be taken out of the universities and many of the obsolete attitudes toward academic leadership remained unchanged. Actually, this is a historical paradox hard to explain: how can one inhibit developing the academic leadership in a transition time when leaders are the only ones to create a vision for a better future?

Although many people would not readily accept, the present *Law of education* is against promoting values and leaders in our universities. It says that the department head must be elected in a democratic way from among all the members of the department. It is forbidden for anybody from outside of the department to candidate for the leading position. In the same way, the dean of a faculty or school is elected only from within that entity; going upwards, the rector of a university can be elected only from within that university. It is clear that, from the elections point of view, a university, a faculty or a department represent closed systems. There is no real competition and a lot of room for internal arrangements. Imposing this close system procedure through the legislation kept the HES from getting the best people for all the top managerial positions, and the *Law of education* contributed directly to eliminating any leadership development. The only way to get out of this vicious circle of closed election systems is to change the whole philosophy of selecting the academic leaders. We may learn from the world class American universities, where searching for a new president is a much elaborated external process, based on corporate experience (Brătianu, 2005; Duderstadt, 2000).

The European University Association (EUA) is supporting the Bologna process and promotes the idea of leadership and innovation in the academic management. In the recent Lisbon Declaration *Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a Common Purpose*, EUA stressed the need for more developed university autonomy and leadership: "Governments are urged to endorse the principle of institutional autonomy so as to accommodate diverse institutional missions and to include academic autonomy (curricula, programs and research), financial autonomy (lump sum budgeting), organizational autonomy (the structure of the university) and staffing autonomy (responsibility for recruitment, salaries and promotion). Autonomy should be founded on adequate public funding and should also facilitate the strategic management of public and private income and endorsements (from philanthropists, companies, alumni and students) by the universities themselves. Governments are urged to benchmark progress against target levels set in relation to both autonomy and funding of universities. Universities will strive to reinforce further leadership and strengthen professional management" (Lisbon Declaration, 2007, p. 6).

Although leadership might constitute an ambiguous quality in universities, by comparison with politics or business, there is a tremendous need of it because of the vision and motivation power it provides. As M. Shattock, a former Registrar of the University of Warwick – one of the most entrepreneurial universities from UK – demonstrated in one of his famous works: “Strong leaders in universities are for the most part successful because they build robust structures and strong teams and work with them to seek institutional success, not because they are always out in front leading the change” (Shattock, 2003, pp. 91-92). Unlike the political leaders, the academic leaders should be more consensual rather than charismatic. They have to understand that leadership should not be concentrated only at the top of the university; it should be dispersed over the whole university, in departments, in research groups, and in all managerial structures which are specific for a university.

Governance is a concept that implies an autonomous and independent organization, a condition none of the continental European universities meets. The situation is even harsher in the Romanian HES due to the relatively high degree of centralization. Governance would nurture strategic vision and would support the elaboration of strategies for the university development. In the same time, a governance body could play a decisive role in searching for and finally nominating the president or the rector of the university. There were some incipient innovations in this field, implying a little bending of the legislation. For instance, starting from the year 2000, some universities decided to create a new managerial position as the *president* of the university, a position not mentioned in the *Law of education*. This is a non-executive position, but with a lot of influence in developing the strategy of a university. Actually, this position has been created for former rectors in order to keep them close to the new rectors to help them in the decision making process. Also, some universities created a formal *Board of trustees* with a rather consulting role, which is very ineffective from a performance viewpoint.

## **6. Conclusions**

Worldwide, the influence of globalization constantly changes the way higher education is perceived and approached, bringing up new and unforeseen challenges for the governments and universities to deal with. Therefore, the concepts of vision and strategy, along with the practice of good governance and effective management seem to have ultimately conquered the academic world. In the harsh competition on the international education market, it is vital for a higher education institution to be highly autonomous and free from the strings of governmental centralization, strings that have proven to hinder the development and growth of universities individually and of the HES globally.

Although coming from the political field, the concept of governance has grown deep roots in the academic world, especially in United States where the autonomy of the universities from the federal or state government is higher than anywhere else. On the continental Europe, the restricted autonomy and the involvement of the

state in the life of academia is holding back the real practice of governance in higher education. Taking into account the research in the field and the reality of the academic world, it seems that the difference between governance and management in higher education is that the first concept can only be applied to highly autonomous entities such as countries, private corporations or universities not subordinated to the state, and that the second concept – management – is the one that can be used in the case of dependent entities, such as government departments, business subsidiaries or state-owned universities.

Until European countries, and here Romania and the other former socialist countries occupy a special position because of their political past, do not change their public policies toward providing universities with a high level of autonomy, academic governance remains only a trendy but not a really applicable concept.

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