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Edited by Department of Public Administration and Management  
Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences

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Babeş-Bolyai University  
Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences  
Department of Public Administration and Management

# Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences

No. 58 E / October / 2019

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## STUDENTS'S VISITORS – AMONG THE UNEXPLORED TYPES OF LOCAL TOURISM?

Andrei CHIRCĂ  
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### Abstract

Universities have the capacity to attract students from a vast geographical area, thus resulting in new residences for its host city. This is a well-known effect especially for major and prestigious universities located in relatively small locations. Babeş-Bolyai University in the city of Cluj-Napoca is such an example. Using our survey data, we explore a form of local tourism left rather unexplored – the students' visitors.

Our results show that only 9.3% of these visitors spend the night at a hotel or hostel making this type of tourism little known and mostly untraceable for official tourism data. An estimated 7.5 million Euros were spent only by the BBU students' visitors in the city of Cluj-Napoca in the year of 2015.

**Keywords:** tourism, higher education, economic impact, Cluj-Napoca, students' visitors, universities.

## 1. Introduction

Universities, through their contribution to human capital training, through the research they carry out and their direct involvement in innovation, play an even more important role in an economy of knowledge. The role of universities is no longer reduced to education, research and – possibly – public service; universities are increasingly more often assigned the role of catalysts of local and regional economy development (Steinnes, 1987; Drucker and Goldstein, 2007). This third mission, beyond the two classical ones – education and research – gets increasingly more accommodated among higher education institutions.

In terms of short-term and demand-side effects impact, the university participates directly in the economic life of the host-city: it shops from local suppliers, has employees it compensates financially, attracts students who – during their studies – become city residents (Pastor, Pérez and de Guevara, 2013). Moreover, it also attracts tourists, such as potential students, relatives and friends of students, participants to university events. Estimating the universities' contribution through these factors that are directly attributed to universities may prove a more feasible and pragmatic approach.

Estimating visitors' economic contribution is a part of the vast majority of the methodologies used in assessing impact of a university or a group of universities upon a specific geographical area where they are located: from Caffrey and Isaacs's pioneering model dating back in 1971, still used in case studies and estimations of universities' contributions into local economies, to a more recent one (Pastor, Pérez and de Guevara, 2013) used by universities in Spain. Its validity is given by the ten economic impact studies carried out by Spanish universities between 2008 and 2014.

The main line of reasoning behind tackling this topic consists in the absence of impact studies generated by higher education institutions, as well as the lack of debates on this subject in the Romanian public sphere. The absence of such studies does not just overlook the universities' economic role and contribution into the host-community, but also leaves several aspects linked to higher education unexplored, such as the structure of spending made by the university, students' living costs, migration and tourism generated by the university, the economic burden for sustaining higher education, and the distribution of this burden between the public and the private sectors.

The largest Romanian cities hosting universities (Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest, Iași and Timișoara) represent the most suitable environment for carrying out such studies, as they deal with the perception of the students' importance for the cities' economies, even if left unmeasured. Moreover, these university centers host nationally prestigious universities, and their appeal becomes evident not just through the numbers of student applicants, but also through their geographical origin.

The most representative case consists of the presence of the Babeș-Bolyai University (BBU from here on) from Cluj-Napoca, which encompasses half of the students in the city, who altogether make up over 20% of the city's population. BBU students originate from all Romanian counties and abroad, and account for a permanence in Cluj-Napoca of ten months per year, on average. Moreover, BBU ranks among the

most important employers in Cluj-Napoca, and the university's budget could place it among the top ten companies in town, according to its turnover.

The issue's importance stems from the realities of Romanian higher education, undergoing a fairly difficult time because of legislative inconsistencies, the decrease of student population at the national level, and the already chronic underfunding (see the Annual Public Report of CNFIS, 2016). Deemed a national priority, both by the Education Law and by gatekeepers – on a discursive level –, education – especially higher education – does not benefit from proper attention, which is shown in the allocation of insufficient funds, legislative and procedural changes, and especially the lack of relevant empirical studies regarding its importance, role, and impact (Chircă and Lazăr, 2018).

The paper is structured as follows: the next section explores some conceptual aspects regarding the studies of economic impact of universities where the visitors' expenditure issues are a part of the studies, while the third section presents the methodology and the main results of the survey carried out among Babes-Bolyai University students in order to estimate their visitors' expenditure in the reference year of 2015 as part of the broader study concerning the total students' expenditure during their study and residence in the city of Cluj-Napoca. In section 3 we also present the estimations regarding students' expenditure during their admissions period – another form of tourism due to the presence of the university. Some conclusions are highlighted in the last part of the paper.

## 2. Background

The capacity of a university or a group of universities to influence the socio-economic development of the area in which they are located is well established in the literature (Armstrong, 1993; Bleaney *et al.*, 1992; Blackwell, Cobb and Weinberg, 2002; OECD, 2007; Pastor, Pérez and de Guevara, 2013; Schubert and Kroll, 2016). As a large-scale consumer of inputs such as: labor, goods and services, and generator of outputs: skills, know-how and local attractiveness the university cannot fail at being a major factor in metropolitan economic development (Felsenstein, 1996, p. 1566).

The mark left by university upon a local community can be observed under various forms, tangible and intangible, overt or covert, dependent on several factors, internal and external to the academic environment. Warsh (2006) asserts that it is enough to take a look at any map to observe that cities housing universities have remained on top or renewed themselves around the world; the idea that knowledge is a powerful factor of production requires no more definitive proof than that.

The regional studies enhance the attention towards university role through considerable efforts devoted to understanding the contributions of university to the functioning of regional economies (Florax, 1992; Drucker and Goldstein, 2007). The EU Guide 'Connecting Universities to Regional Growth' issued in 2011, aims at enabling public authorities in promoting an active engagement of higher education institutions in regional innovation strategies for smart specialization, in cooperation with research centers, businesses and other partners in the civil society (European Commission Regional Policy, 2011).

The University is a part of the Tripe Helix (university-industry-government) – an interaction that is the key to innovation in an increasingly knowledge-based society (Etzkowitz, 2008). Universities, the traditional providers of human resources and knowledge, are now critical socio-economic development actors (Dzisah and Etzkowitz, 2008, p. 101).

The local impact on income and employment of a large tertiary education institution such as a university was initially triggered by the rapid expansion of the higher education sector in the 1960's in United States, together with the realization of how important tertiary education institutions are for many local economies (Armstrong, 1993). Moreover, for any significant public investments, there are always questions about the magnitude of their impact (Goldstein and Renault, 2004). University impact studies are one of the three major research approaches in analyzing the role of the university in local development (Felsenstein, 1996).

In 1971, Caffrey and Isaacs prepared for the American Council on Education (ACE) the first methodology; it defines the structure of the analysis, the elements that should be included and steps to be followed. This systematic template addresses the economic impact on local economy on short-term and from the demand-side – economic impact in a certain year/fiscal year carried by university and university related spending (students, visitors and so on).

Goldstein, Maier and Lueger (1995) summarize eight distinctive university outputs that might lead to specific economic development impacts. These vast forms of outputs of the higher education lead to many attempts to reshape or complete the ACE methodology (Elliott, Levin and Meisel, 1988; Bluestone, 1993; Brown and Heaney, 1997), to a better classification of the impact (Leslie and Slaughter, 1992; Beck *et al.*, 1995), or to propose a different one – Ryan's shortcut method (Ryan and Malgieri, 1981).

After reviewing 138 studies covering 241 individual institutions, Siegfried, Sanderson and McHenry (2007) concluded that the results and claims made by their conclusions make them incomparable between them. The clear definition of counterfactual scenario and the area of impact, measuring methods used and double counting, but also the most suitable selection of multipliers for indirect and induced impacts are the major pitfalls that affect the reliability of the conclusions drawn by these studies (Siegfried, Sanderson and McHenry, 2007).

The methodology proposed by Pastor, Pérez and de Guevara (2013), based on Monte Carlo simulations, is taking the basic elements from Caffrey and Isaacs (1971), using the requirements listed by Siegfried, Sanderson and McHenry (2007) and is introducing the stochastic aspects in all the elements that imply assumptions with uncertainty. The part of a clear estimation of students' expenditure, survey design, distinguishing between the student that resides in the same province as the university, types of spending and filtering the results through counterfactual scenario was a particular help to our study.

The complexity of the impact and role played by university in the socio-economic environment has generated countless discussions and debates, yet surprisingly, they have made the object of not so many quantitative studies, especially destined to mea-

asuring and quantifying it. The higher education system in Romania, in its attempt to align and attune itself to the European higher education system – specific to the Western European countries – is best characterized by its perpetual and mostly incoherent reforms, and by its overwhelming unpredictability.

Practices of assessing the universities' contribution within the local and regional economies, while enshrined and well-known in EU countries and USA, are absent from the Romanian setting (Chircă and Lazăr, 2018). The direction assumed by the EU, and Romania implicitly, as a member state, targets the development of an economy based on knowledge and innovation. One of the five main objectives present in the Europe 2020 strategy aims directly at education, and one of the two indicators for measuring this objective endorses higher education; more specifically, that by 2020, at least 40% of the young generation in the EU should have higher education degrees.

The number of impact studies is rather reduced among Romanian companies as well, which is just another proof of overlooking the importance, role, and impact of higher education institutions. The complexity of the economic impact runs the risk of residing in a series of achievements with no real echo among local and national gatekeepers, civil society, as well as the media. A constructive approach of the economic importance must be launched, and estimating a short-term, demand-side impact constitutes the best strategy (Chircă and Lazăr, 2018).

### **3. Visitors' expenditure findings**

The methodologies for quantifying students' visitors' expenditure, as part of the broader study of university's impact in the economy of hosting city, encompasses the following two main aspects: identifying the visitors as one of the impact generating agents and quantifying and estimating the total spending of each types of visitors. In total, four agents of impact generating are identified:

1. The university – through its own spending, minus employees' salaries;
2. University employees – through their spending;
3. Students – through their spending in Cluj-Napoca, throughout their studies; and
4. Visitors to Cluj-Napoca city due to the university; this category targets students' visitors consisting of friends and family members on one hand, and visitors applying to college admissions sessions on the other.

#### **3.1. Methods**

The assessment of visitors' spending is carried out through a sociological inquiry. The survey comprises questions aimed at quantifying the students' spending during their residence in Cluj-Napoca, their spending during the admission period and estimated spending of their visitors.

##### **3.1.1. Studied population**

As of December 2015, BBU reported 41,690 students attending its courses. From this total number we excluded: 3,340 students that are not studying in Cluj-Napoca but in one of the 15 other cities where BBU is present with its extensions; 4,069 post-

graduates and teachers in training; and 3,648 students enrolled in distance learning or part time learning programs. Thus, our general population consists of 29,754 BBU students studying in Cluj-Napoca. BBU statistics office provided the above data mentioning that one student registered at two faculties would be double counted.

### 3.1.2. *Instrument*

We administer a voluntary and non-probability survey in the form of an online questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises 51 questions, apart from sociodemographic questions, the rest of the questionnaire focuses on estimating three major parts of student-related spending in the city: the direct student expenditure during their studies in Cluj-Napoca; students' expenditure during their admissions period; and the spending generated by their visitors (family or friends). We ask specifically to refer to their spending in Cluj-Napoca for the year 2015.

### 3.1.3. *Data analysis procedures*

We run a multiple linear regression using the backward elimination method, from general to specific, in order to identify the most significant independent variables that induce the expenditure dimensions. We calculate the total BBU students' visitors' expenditure and students' expenditure during their admissions period based on an average amount estimated by students.

## 3.2. *Results*

### 3.2.1. *Sample characteristics*

During February – May 2016, we gathered 1,225 answers from BBU students from a purposive sample, of which 1,159 fulfilled validity checks<sup>1</sup>. The sample covers all 21 faculties, Bucharest (the capital city) and 40 out of 41 Romanian counties (NUTS 3 regions). The sample also includes foreign students and students from Republic of Moldova – the latter ones with special status among students from other countries. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on the structure of the general population versus our sample, since the survey was a voluntary and non-probability one.

### 3.2.2. *Multiple linear regression results*

Table 2 provides the multiple linear regression (using the backward method) results having the visitors' spending (per day per person) as a dependent variable and seven independent variables: program (BA, MA, and PhD), year of study, tuition fee, gender, urban or rural, belonging or not to the Cluj-Napoca area, and the type of accommodation.

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<sup>1</sup> 66 answers: were from students not belonging to general population (30 answers were from distance learning BBU students), had missing values for all 24 different types of spending or were double records.

**Table 1:** Sociodemographic characteristics of the initial general population and the sample

Variables	Categories	Percentages	
		General Population	Sample
Year of study	Bachelor 1 <sup>st</sup> year	28.9	33.4
	Bachelor 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	20.7	24.1
	Bachelor 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	20.2	18.9
	Bachelor 4 <sup>th</sup> year	2.6	3.8
	Masters 1 <sup>st</sup> year	12.1	7.8
	Masters 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	11.4	8.5
	PhD 1 <sup>st</sup> year	1.4	0.7
	PhD 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	1.4	2.2
	PhD 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	1.3	0.6
Type of tuition	Without tuition fee	69.6	74.7
	Paying tuition fee	30.4	25.3
Gender	Male	35.3	29.2
	Female	64.7	70.8
Scholarship	Yes	17	16.8
	No	83	83.2
Initial residence	Cluj-Napoca area*	19	7.3
	Outside Cluj-Napoca area	81	92.7
Resident in student dormitory	Yes	20	32
	No	80	68

\* Cluj-Napoca area will cover the city of Cluj-Napoca and the surroundings within 20 km (university standard in terms of being eligible to receive dormitory).

**Source:** Own elaboration

**Table 2:** Multiple linear regression – results at the final 12<sup>th</sup> step

	Unstandardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
Gender (reference category Male)				
Dummy Female	14.270***	5.458	2.614	.009
Urban or Rural (reference category Urban)				
Dummy Rural	14.919**	6.816	2.189	.029
Accommodation (reference category Student dormitory)				
Dummy Renting house	14.053***	5.068	2.773	.006
Dummy Own house	24.753*	12.668	1.954	.051
(Constant)	75.228***	5.424	13.87	.000
No. Observation	981			
R square	0.20			
Adjusted R square	0.16			
F-statistic	2.652			
p-value (F-stat)	0.000			

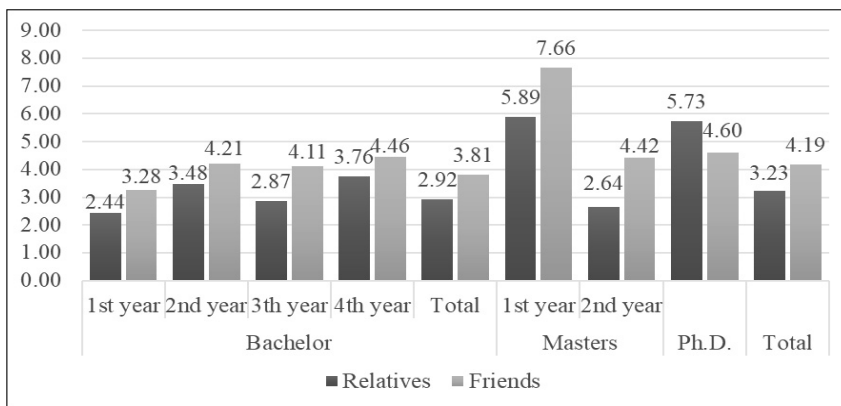
\*\*\* - significant at 1%, \*\* - significant at 5%, \* - significant at 10%

**Source:** Own Elaboration

### 3.2.3. Total student visitors' expenditure

Due to the presence of students in the city, they attract visitors from the ranks of their families and friends, among other effects owed to the presence of the university in town. It is a specific type of tourism, very poorly monitored, which certainly generates spending and, consequently, contributes to the economy of the city where it takes place.

On average, throughout 2015, one student received the visit of a number of 3.23 people from his or her family, and 4.19 people from among his or her friends. We estimate that the averages are underestimated due to lower means in the cases of first-year BA students, holding roughly 4.8 months of permanence in Cluj-Napoca in 2015; these students marked even fewer visits – as shown in Figure 1.



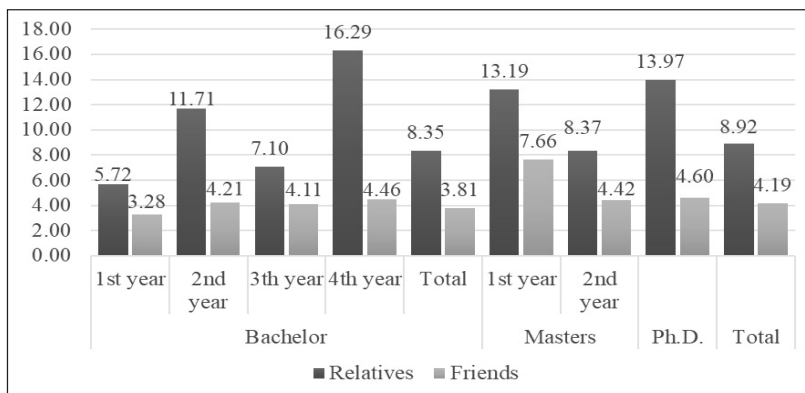
**Figure 1:** Total number of visitors received by BBU students in 2015

**Source:** Own elaboration

We also have to mention that 198 (17.9%) respondents reported zero family members, and 258 (23.7%) reported zero friends visiting throughout the 2015 university year. The average of days per visit amounts to 8.92 for families, and 9.91 for friends. Adjusting the mean and eliminating five cases from the upper extreme cases, we set as reference point 7.59 days for families and 8.13 days for friends. As noticed above for the number of visitors, the means of the total visit days are significantly lower for first-year BA students, namely an average of 6.06 total days for family members, and 6.22 for friends.

These visitors spent an average of 16.9 Euro per day per person. Adjusting the average and eliminating five cases from the upper extreme cases, we set as reference point the amount of 16.2 Euro as the mean daily expenditure of a Cluj-Napoca visitor of one or more students, regardless if they are family members or friends. We also must add that 9.2% of respondents stated that their visitors spent zero Euro.

Using this average daily expenditure of a visitors and the cumulated number of visit days, in the case of relatives, as well as friends, it results that among all BBU students (29,754 students – BA, MA, and PhD level in Cluj-Napoca, full-time students),



**Figure 2:** Total number of days per visitor of BBU students in 2015

**Source:** Own elaboration

their visitors in 2015 would have spent 7,577,273 Euro. Thus, through each full-time student in Cluj-Napoca, BBU attracted, in 2015, an extra 255 Euro per year solely through the visits they received, which summed up to the 29,754 students would amount up to 9.81% of the total of BBU expenditures in 2015.

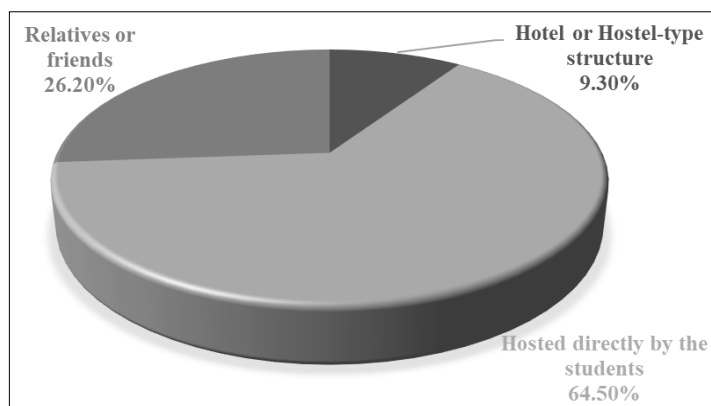
**Table 3:** Total visitors expenditure in 2015 (Euro/year)

	Average total annual number of days	Average daily spending (Euro)	Total (Euro)
Family members	7.59	16.2	3,658,492
Friends	8.13		3,918,780
<b>Total</b>	<b>15.72</b>		<b>7,577,273</b>

**Source:** Own elaboration

### 3.2.4. Visitors' accommodation preferences

When receiving visitors (friends, family members), only 9.3% of these visitors spend the night at a hotel or other official establishment that provides paid lodging on short-term basis. This type of tourism may never collect official tourism data, since so little of it is known and trackable. The majority (64.5%) chose to be hosted directly by the students they were visiting, and the rest of 26.2% chose a different type of accommodation, such as relatives or friends, as presented in Figure 3. This distribution is easily understood due to the types of students' accommodations. The high proportion of students paying rent justifies visitors being hosted by them – among the 503 students living in rentals in Cluj-Napoca, 88.1% hosted the visitors.



**Figure 3:** Visitors' accommodation preferences

**Source:** Own elaboration

### 3.2.5. Admission period expenditure

Admissions are the time frame when the university attracts a significant number of visitors to the city, their sole purpose being the participation to the admission selection to one of the BBU colleges. Of the 1,149 total respondents, 79.3% declared coming (back) to Cluj-Napoca during admissions, and only 20.7% stated that they already resided in the city during that time. Evidently, the percentage differs significantly based on study cycles, thus being higher for BA students – as 86.6% of them traveled to Cluj-Napoca for the admission process, compared to 52.9% for MA and just 34.1% for PhD students. The roughly 80% of respondents who came or returned to Cluj-Napoca during the admissions declared an average of 5.03 days of permanence in the city. Adjusting the mean in negative values and underestimating the number of days spent in Cluj-Napoca during admissions, we managed to eliminate six of the upper extreme cases, thus obtaining an average of 3.85 permanent days for 876 respondents. The average scores are higher for PhD students (5.57 days in the city), which is probably due to the duration of the admission process.

We can observe a difference in days of permanence based on the region of origin, as BA students from the North-West region spend an average of 2.81 days (based on 281 respondents), and those from the center spend 3.08 days (188 respondents), compared to the 6.16 days spent by students of the same study cycle from the North-East region (143 respondents).

Inquired about the average of daily expenditures during admissions, respondents' answers generated an average amount of 26.08 Euro. Should we eliminate four singular cases from the upper extreme for a more representative – and possibly underestimated – average, we get a daily average of 24.33 Euro. According to data from the Permanent Bureau for Admissions of BBU, in 2015, just in the case of BA-level studies, candidates for one of the full-time student positions, a number of 15,066 candidates participated in the admissions process organized by BBU. This would translate

into a flux of almost 33,145 people, who resided in Cluj-Napoca for an average of 3.85 days, spending over 1.41 million Euros – roughly 2% of the total spending of BBU in 2015. Accounting for the MA candidates (4,565) and PhD candidates (450), we get a total expenditure amount of 1,880,878 Euro.

However, if we take into account the 19% of BBU students residing in the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area or the 20.7% of respondents declaring to already live in Cluj-Napoca during admissions, we adjust the total spending to 79.3%. Thus, the total spending of prospective students visiting Cluj-Napoca during admissions at BBU can be estimated, for 2015, to 1,491,536 Euro.

BBU, while organizing the admission for its 21 faculties, brings to the city economy almost 1.5 million Euros in the form of direct spending, without taking into account the local candidates who, without BBU's existence, might have been out of the city for the same reason.

The preferred type of accommodation during this permanence for 20.4% of the respondents are hotels or hostels, compared to 45.5% who declared opting for residing with friends or family, 9.7% in the university's dormitories, 3.7% in other dormitories, and the rest of 20.8% in other types of accommodation. The respondents reported an average of 1.2 accompanying people, thus for each student we count, on average, other 1.2 people participating to this type of tourism that contributes, to some extent, to the economy of Cluj-Napoca.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Given the size of the total spending of students, the contribution visitors make through their spending in Cluj-Napoca amounts to a relatively modest figure, of below 5%. However, the amounts are not negligible and need to be studied as any other touristic phenomenon. Several other categories of visitors can be added to those presented in this research, such as visitors who participate to conferences or sports events, as well as other special events organized by the university, business visitors to the university and visitors of several structures of the university, such as the 'Alexandru Borza' botanical garden or the astronomical observatory.

The expenditures of students' visitors do, however, reach a total estimate five times higher than the visitors' spending during admissions. Should a study about tourism generated by the university's presence be conducted, these data can represent a great starting point. The relatively low contribution of the visitors compared to the other components of the impact is the main reason why other categories of visitors, such as conference participants or other scientific events, remained unmeasured in this study.

The Economic Impact Guidelines handbook (2014), carried out by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities with the Association of American Universities, stipulates that universities are so focused on learning, research, and engagement missions, that they fail to lend proper attention to the contributions brought to the economy and, on a wider scale, to the socio-economic context. Put simply, the guide

postulates that universities no longer have the capacity of showcasing what they actually represent within the host-city, from an economic standpoint.

In the specific case of Romanian higher education institutions, this assertion is just as applicable. Moreover, accomplishing their mission becomes an ever more unattainable target when facing an incoherent and deficient legislative system, chronic underfunding of higher education, and negative demographic evolutions. Universities' capacity to study, measure, and communicate their contribution to local and regional economic development becomes, thus, increasingly improbable.

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