INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION. 
THE ACTION PLAN FOR DETERMINING FOREIGN 
STUDENTS TO COME TO ROMANIA

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Abstract:
The aim of this article is to present the concept of higher education internationalization as well as to outline an action plan which can make foreign students come to Romania. Over the time, internationalization has been the topic of many academic fields, including the higher education. It is the result of a process that is mentioned in almost all of the academic works and studies, namely the globalization process. This process is the source of the transformation at the individual level and at the higher education level as well. Thus, the mobility of both the students and the professors is growing, determining partnership agreements between universities in different parts of the world, as well as the promotion of learning programs in which the subjects are taught by using international languages.

Key words: internationalization, higher education, education, action plan.

JEL Classification: I28

Internationalization of education and higher education

Generally, education may be defined as a social institution that allows and promotes ability and knowledge acquisition as well as the expansion of the personal views. In addition, international education means much more than expanding one’s personal views and “opening the eyes”. The encouragement of global and intercultural knowledge is essential in a world that is more and more interdependent and this situation that has been developing since very old times, when students and scientists traveled abroad in order to join the academic communities outside their own countries.

The universities have always had a mission and an international character. The word “university” itself includes the notion of universe, a kind of international space appropriate for the universal development known by those who work at a local and international level with students and resources.
from different parts of the world. In their work *International handbook of higher education*, James Forest and Philip Altbach stated that university was a European invention and started from the idea of one community – the community of the Master students and undergraduates. The first European universities appeared in Bologna, Salerno and Paris in the twelfth century, other 16 universities being created in England, France, Italy and Spain in 1300. There was an association of the medieval Master programs among these institutions, association that was based on common beliefs and reciprocity. The creation of the modern universities and the university reform started in Scotland (the eighteenth century) and Germany (the nineteenth century). The university reform in Germany lead to the concept of academic freedom which includes the idea of freedom to teach as well as freedom to learn. This concept also influenced other countries than the European ones, determining both the students and the professors to choose universities abroad.

The word “internationalization” has become a buzz-word for all the countries that are ready to become powerful and efficient actors on the new global stage of higher education. The concept of internationalization of higher education includes the activities or strategies at a district, national or institutional level that are meant to integrate the international education in the present curriculum. Damtew Teffera and Jane Knight defined the word “internationalization” in their work “Higher education in Africa: the international dimension” as a term with different meanings to different people. That is why it is used differently as international activities of the academic mobility type for students and professors, as international contacts, partnerships and projects or by integrating the international, intercultural and /or global dimension in the curriculum.

Felix Maringe and Nick Fosket were the first to present the way in which universities act in their work “Globalization and Internationalization in higher education”, the authors mentioning the fact that initially universities perform within their own national space, being part of the national education system and their main responsibilities develop within the country. The most important characteristic of the global system of higher education is heterogeneity. Heterogeneity or the lack of uniformity of the universities all over the world made important journals such as *Times Higher Education, Academic Ranking of World Universities* managed by the researchers at the Centre for World-Class Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University decide the top of the most wanted universities, based on various criteria such as: research (the number of research grants, the number of citations in ISI journals, the number of articles and books published by each professor, the number of candidates attending postdoctoral studies), teaching (the number of students per professor, the number of accredited faculties), infrastructure (high-tech equipments, the total of books in the library), human resources (the number of professors with a PhD. diploma), internationalization (the number of foreign students and professors), students (the number of students who obtain a job right after graduation, the number of PhD. candidates, etc.). Thus, a hierarchy of the universities has much influence on the future students’ decision, on how the professors will be recruited as well as on the mobility of students and professors.

According to the criteria mentioned above, *Times Higher Education* powered by Thomson Reuters, established a top of the 400 best universities in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania and South America. As a result, there are seven American universities and 3 British universities occupying the first ten places. (http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2012-13/world-ranking).

### Table 1. World University Rankings 2012-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Country/Region</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>California Institute of Technology</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>University of Oxford</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Princeton University</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Internationalization of the Romanian higher education system and the plan structure regarding foreign students’ coming to Romania

Each country has its own socio-cultural portrait, which makes the foreign student receptive. When a student chooses to study in a certain country, it is obvious that something motivated him to select the education system in that country in the detriment of other countries. Consequently, motivation is the most important element that has to be considered when creating strategic plans in order to make foreign students come to the Romanian universities. Great efforts to attract foreign students have been made since 1990. Right after the 1989 revolution, Romania signed bilateral agreements with other countries in Europe, the USA, Canada, etc., agreements which stipulated the possibility to exchange students. In 1996, Romania joined the SOCRATES program (including ERASMUS) initiated by the European Union since 1987. The ERASMUS program is part of the Lifelong Learning Program and includes actions for the European cooperation in the higher education field. ERASMUS supports the development of the European dimension of the university and post university studies, the program covering all the study subjects and fields.

Another important element for the internationalization of the Romanian education system is the fact that the Romanian students could benefit from free movement after the 1989 revolution. Thus, the Romanian students’ possibility to study and research at universities abroad has determined an update of the existent curricula, as well as the integration of new subjects in the academic curricula.

The internationalization process of the Romanian higher education also included the study programs (Bachelor’s studies and Master’s studies) in languages other than Romanian, such as English, French, German, etc. in different fields (Economics, Public Administration, Medicine, Finance, Political Sciences, Engineering, etc.). According to a study made by the Education Sciences Institute, about 40 000 foreign students from the Republic of Moldavia, Albany, Greece, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, China and Israel were studying in Romania in 2008. The main reasons for this attraction are the low costs and the high quality, the students being mainly attracted by the medical, economic and technical fields. According to the Ministry of Education, students from non-UE countries can study in Romania if they meet the following criteria: they possess documents certifying the citizenship in that country, they have documents which prove the necessary qualification, they submitted their file in due time, they chose a higher education institution and an accredited specialization.

Another novelty for the Romanian education system was the participation at the Bologna Process right from the start in 1999. Since that year up to the present a complex legislation has been adopted in order to adjust the Romanian education system to the European requirements, to create mobility for students, to increase their chances on the job market, to facilitate their participation at the Master and PhD. programs. The higher education system in Romania has been organized in three years of study for the Bachelor’s studies since 2005. The first promotion of students who attended Bachelor’s studies according to the Bologna Process principles graduated, and the first candidates for the Master’s studies as university studies were examined in 2008.

The plan structure for foreign students’ attraction to Romania

Different types of activities dedicated to both students and professors should be considered when developing strategic plans:

A. Activities that decide the market – as the place and the student type to which the university addresses;

B. Activities meant to inform and direct which represent the first step that the university must make in order to attract the foreign students. It is very important for a university to promote itself by different means:

1. Opening specialized offices abroad to deal with:
   • presenting the host- country during their studies (climate, geographical relief, tourism);
• presenting the educational offer;
• university registration.

2. Designing web-sites having the following characteristics:
• Can be accessed in different foreign languages;
• Present a map that indicates the position of the host-country on the world map;
• Clearly present the study program for each year and the syllabus for each subject that is going to be studied;
• The possibility to send the submission file by internet following steps that are clearly set by the university.
• To offer those who are interested a discussion forum: Questions and Answers

3. Signing collaboration protocol agreements with high schools and universities abroad so that the professors from the Romanian universities can be allowed to present the university campus.

4. Participating at international fairs where they can present the educational offer and the accommodation offer.

C. Education activities:
1. student-centered:
• offering scholarships to the Romanian students so that they can go abroad and present the university image;
• student exchange programs;
• study visits;
• promoting the image of the Olympic students abroad (students who obtained very good results at national and international contests) as a way to point out the quality and performance of the Romanian education (the first step towards this activity was made in 2008 when the Romanian students who had won the International Olympiad for Geography were awarded their medals in Tunis).

2. professor-centered:
• mobility programs for the Romanian professors to go abroad to training courses;
• temporary professor exchange programs for teaching activity in the host-country;
• programs for the associate professors who are teaching abroad for long periods of time;

3. both student- and professor-centered:
• foreign language study;
• national and foreign language and culture training;
• local and international studies on specific topics;
• enhancing the importance of the teaching-learning process;
• developing accredited summer educational programs (summer schools). The organizers of these summer schools must invite personalities from different fields to offer the students information on the practical activity.

D. Research activities – the management of the educated group (cooperation within competition):
• launching research projects with foreign students’ participation;
• organization of student conferences, publishing their research papers in scientific volumes; the students’ best presentations are to be selected and made in order to participate in other conferences organized by other universities in the country and abroad.
• opening research centers on different fields of interest.

E. Extracurricular activities:
• Creating student associations and clubs;
• Launching international and intercultural events;
• Creating theatre, musical, dancing groups including foreign and local students guided by professional artists;
• Developing specific activities in order to know the student’s personality.

Conclusions

Considering universities within the global higher education system, we can state that they have various characteristics, distinct horizons and their performance is situated on different levels according to certain criteria such as research, teaching process, infrastructure, human resources, student number and internalization degree.

During the long development process of higher education there were many changes of the form and the structure at university level: the appearance of many universities (offering their students special facilities according to the labor market requirements), major changes of the curricula, international mobility of students and professors (by means of various learning programs), linking the universities in different countries through informational networks, university sites in English - language which is
lingua franca nowadays - and the permanent attempt of the universities to create strategic plans in order to attract foreign students.

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