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AGENTA ROMÂNĂ
DE ASIGURARE A
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ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR

THE BOLOGNA GRADUATES' INTEGRATION INTO THE LABOUR MARKET AND THE NECESSITY OF AN EFFICIENT AND COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT



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THE BOLOGNA GRADUATES' INTEGRATION INTO THE LABOUR MARKET AND THE NECESSITY OF AN EFFICIENT AND COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT

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1. Introduction

- The link between HE and scientific research with the economic environment, the graduates' professional integrations into the labour market – **a priority** of the reform policies within the Bologna Process;
- In Romania, this relation – still undermined by a lot of key factors, implying: **the university management**, **the employers' attitude** towards the graduates' insertion (suspicious or negative), the **absent or precarious institutional partnerships and collaboration programmes**, the **insufficient interest** and **opening** to the link between the academic area and the economic environment on one side or another, problems related to the **governmental policies**, to the **legislative framework** – do not offer a comprehensive space for the development of this fundamental link;
- The present study aims at establishing the main **causes** of the situation, and at proposing some **solutions**.



2. The orientation of higher education towards the economic environment and the graduates' integration into the labour market

2.1. The graduates' employability – a priority at European level (Trends 2010)

- Trends 2010 – the link between HE and the labour market, assessed from the graduates' employability perspective – a major topic;
- Employability: a major concern at all levels; a special challenge at the first cycle of studies – the most important difficulties;
- the second cycle: seen with confidence by both students and employers; the master remains the basic qualification for the integration into the labour market;
- In some countries, institutions, academics and students – no confidence in the first Bologna cycle value; expect the employers not to accept the bachelor graduates;
- Trends 2010 concludes: at the entrance into the labour market, the acceptance of the first cycle is problematic, especially where the first cycle of studies used to be, traditionally, very long, and where the actual *bachelor* represents a *cultural shock* for the system.



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2.2. Romanian higher education and the link with the labour market

- problems of HE system in implementing the Bologna Reform;
- specific difficulties: the shock of the encounter between the academic education classic paradigm and the new model advanced by the reform.

2.2.1. The conflict of paradigms: *closed model* vs *open model*

- the difficulty of a real change, of the educational process reformation: in Romanian HE system – a conflict, a dramatic confrontation between two educational models: the traditional and the new one;
- the *closed model* – the *open model* (Bologna paradigm of education).



2.2.2. The Bologna Reform in Romanian higher education, under the risk of experiment

- lack of synchronization between the academic cycles and the educational process content;
- the new structure of university studies (the Bologna three cycles pattern) has generated problems in the reform implementation;
- In many HEIs studies are not research-based;
- Essential problem: Romanian HE system – the weak relation between the educational process and the economic environment.



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2.3. The graduates' integration into the labour market – a difficulty of Romanian universities

2.3.1. Higher education – still isolated by the economic environment and by the labour market

- integration into the labour market, especially at the first cycle level, is a *difficult process* in today's Romania;
- the difficult employment: complex causes, implying universities, the state, public and private institutions;
- the *split* afflicts the systemic coherence of the academic education, breaks the unity and the logics of the whole evolution from premises to finalities;
- Paradoxically, it happens inside the Bologna reform, which focuses on the development of skills and competencies to students, on the link of higher education with the economic environment, on addressability to the labour market;
- The “guilt” must not be looked for only inside the higher education system, but also in the governing system, which has not created the key factors for the harmonization and enhancement of the institutional relations between education and practice.



2.3.2. The integration into the labour market – a random process

- HE graduates (first cycle especially) do not integrate into the labour market through a coherent process of professional insertion;
- the integration: randomly, under chance and hazard, many times in other professions;
- situation – ameliorated with the second cycle: the master studies – usually associated with superior skills and competencies; the master degree: an extra chance for the graduates' integration in a profession;
- employers' acceptance degree toward the master graduates: higher than with bachelor;
- insertion into the labour market: a *personal problem*, not governed by a **system of principles and rules within the framework of institutional partnerships and collaborations**, between universities and companies, firms, corporations, holdings, organizations etc.
- the doctoral studies: the competencies and qualifications developed – considered a solid support for the career progress.



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2.3.3. The academic programmes and the failure of the link with the labour market

- Curricula - not responding yet to the society and economic environment challenges and necessities;
- study programmes – not flexible, do not integrate subjects and topics requested by the labour market, by the rapid evolutions in the economic environment;
- quality of education: still a problem and a concern of Romanian HE;
- the system has not succeeded yet in achieving a *reform of quality* and a *culture of quality* at institutional level;
- In Romanian HEIs: stress on knowledge, not on skills and competencies; with knowledge, but no competencies graduates have poor chances to get integrated into the labour market, in a job from the speciality area;
- *coherent policies*, with well-defined strategies and finalities, regarding the *students' practice* and also the *graduates' integration* into the labour market – still a need at HEIs level;
- practice programmes: often *formal, insufficient, irrelevant* and *inefficient*,
- *partnerships with employers*, the *private scholarships systems*, the *investments in human resources*, the *entrepreneurial programmes* – incipient phase, without relevant outcomes;
- HEIs have not developed yet *competitive counselling and career guidance services* for graduates and for their *insertion* into the labour market; *slow reaction* to the rapid evolutions of reality, societal challenges and needs.



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2.3.4. The employers and the graduates' employability

- Employers: skepticism towards the bachelor graduates, and more confidence towards the master graduates;
- Employers perceive the bachelor as *insufficient* for students to acquire skills, abilities and competencies necessary for the professional qualification and for their insertion into the labour market;
- This perception often has an objective support: the first cycle graduates' insufficient training, in terms of skills, competencies and qualifications;
- However, a major cause of the graduates' employability problem: *employers' attitude* – insufficient interest, lack of implication in collaborating with HEIs in the graduates' absorption into the labour environment;
- The employers have not developed: solid partnerships with universities, recruitment policies for graduates, human resources training programmes by education investments, specialization programmes, financing systems for their future graduates' studies;
- Not only the universities, but also the employers must adjust their vision, policies and strategies in this area.



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3. The necessity of an efficient and competitive academic management

- In the reformation process of HE and scientific research, the **university management** – a key role at institutional level;
- An **efficient and competitive academic management** – crucial for the successful implementation of the reform, for building a quality education and a competitive scientific research, for excellence, innovation, creativity and international opening in the education process;
- In the critical situation of the *defective relation* between HE and the labour market, in the graduates' employability problem: *solutions* – at the managerial level of HEIs.
- measures must be oriented to a common finality: **the graduates', especially the *bachelor graduates*', better insertion into the labour market.**



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3.1. A modern managerial vision for the institutional development (1)

- At the university management level, a *modern vision* needed;
- the managerial programme must provide *fundamental elements*, referring to the **curricular philosophy**, on the one hand, and to the **collaboration with employers**, on the other;
- The **first category** of strategies and measures includes:
 - ✓ the implementation of the curricular reform at the level of each study programme;
 - ✓ the reform of quality in academic education and scientific research;
 - ✓ the development of a flexible curriculum, modularized, adapted to the economic environment and society necessities;
 - ✓ **the inclusion in the curriculum of the speciality practice**, as a prior importance element;
 - ✓ the extension of the optional courses presence in the study programmes;
 - ✓ the cultivation of the inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches;
 - ✓ the stimulation of the students' innovative approaches and creativity;
 - ✓ the focus of the educational process on the development of competencies for the first- degree qualifications;



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3.1. A modern managerial vision for the institutional development (2)

- the encouragement of the students' and graduates' entrepreneurial spirit;
- the development of lifelong learning programmes, with study modules for new competencies and qualifications, in view of professional conversion;
- the development of the Didactic Staff Training Department for those interested in achieving didactic careers in the secondary or higher education;
- the development of counseling and career guidance services for the future graduates;
- the making of a tracking system of the graduates in the process of their integration into the labour market and, further, in career; the collaboration with the alumni associations in collecting data about the graduates' professional track;
- the foundation of **two new positions in the management teams** of the university and of the departments (faculties): the **vice-rector** and the **vice-dean** in charge with the link between the academic education and scientific research with the labour market.



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3.1. A modern managerial vision for the institutional development (3)

- The *second category* of strategies and measures comprises:
 - ✓ the foundation and development of collaboration programmes and partnerships with employers (public or private institutions, enterprises, commercial societies, firms, multinational companies, corporations, holdings, non-governmental organizations etc.);
 - ✓ the development within these frames of the students' speciality practice;
 - ✓ the creation, through such collaborations and partnerships, of a framework of co-involvement of firms and companies in the educational process, for instance by **programmes developed by employers for financing the studies or by private scholarships systems, addressed to the training and qualification of students** as their future employees;
 - ✓ **the implication of employers in the curricular policies**, in the curricula making process at different study programmes, according to the skills, competencies and qualifications expected from their future employees. All these should make the object of a future legislative regulation, under the form of a normative act at a law level.



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3.1.1. The curricular reform: education in search of quality and efficiency (1)

- Most of the measures in the **first category**: subordinated to *the curricular reform*.
- a reform directed to the achievement of a quality, efficient, pragmatic and competitive education, at national, European and global level; a *reform of quality* in education and research, an objective of prior importance;
- the reform of quality implies a series of other reforms at all levels: education vision, study programmes, strategies, didactic approaches and means, academic mentality, study conditions;
- A priority of the curricular reform: education orientation to life, economic environment, labour market, in a process of vision reformation, of conceptual renewal, with the education emancipation of its purely theoretical and abstract model;
- Such a revolutionary process, possible with the support of strategy elements as: **student-centred teaching act, the education orientation to well-defined finalities, referring to the achievement of skills and competencies for professional qualifications**;
- a *flexible curriculum, open* to the needs of society and economic environment, to integrate new subjects and topics, requested by the knowledge society.

3.1.1. The curricular reform: education in search of quality and efficiency (2)

- education is changing on three coordinates: **conception, content (curricular reform), finalities;**
- At the third level, finalities, the fundamental objective of academic education is to form, at the future graduates, competencies in view of their qualification and integration into the labour market;
- Bologna reform: a revolution of education, by its orientation to a pragmatic paradigm, of quality, utility and social efficiency – a powerful paradigm, in accordance with the actual requests;
- In such a context, the students' practice has a role of highest importance at the curriculum level and in the framework of forming, to students, of a set of skills and competencies for their qualification in the specialization area;
- The essential revision of the practice status in the academic curricula is therefore a need: from a secondary experience, a facultative discipline, practice must become a key experience in the curricular area of the study programmes.



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3.1.1. The curricular reform: education in search of quality and efficiency (3)

- HEIs must create programmes for encouraging and training the students' **entrepreneurial spirit**;
- a pragmatic way to challenge their creativity and innovation capacity in the area of ideas and solutions for developing their own initiatives, according to the skills and competencies achieved by education;
- A prior importance domain of the modern HEIs: the **counseling and career guidance services for students and graduates**;
- Such services: a priority of a competitive and efficient university management and a necessity of the today's university, a pillar of the knowledge-based society;
- An element of the efficient management: **tracking systems** regarding the graduates' integration into the labour market, their career development and professional becoming.

3.1.2. The opening of higher education to employers (1)

- The **second coordinate** of managerial action at the universities level: *the collaboration with the employers' environment*;
- a challenge for the institution's development and success in the knowledge-based society and economy, in the domains of the graduates' qualification and of the social progress;
- the challenge refers both to the managers' aptitudes: to achieve cooperation programmes with employers, make the transfer of knowledge and competencies *extra muros*, develop the link of university with the economic environment and the institutional addressability to the professional areas, and also to the institution's capacity of adapting itself to the labour market requests;
- the initiation of cooperation programmes and partnerships with employers: a measure to support the direct relation between the HEIs and the economic environment, favourable to the development of a training common framework;
- a space for developing the skills and competencies for the qualifications provided by the first study cycle;
- the framework for the students' practice, by which they are trained for their future jobs, taking benefit of the employers' infrastructure, of their specialists' expertise.

3.1.2. The opening of higher education to employers (2)

- Cooperation between HEIs and companies: the framework for employers to develop financing programmes for the academic training of students, selected according to the skills and competencies criteria, in view of their future integration into the activity developed by employers;
- a way of sponsoring, on contract basis, the future employees' studies and training – an investment in competent and qualified human resources;
- the private scholarships granted by employers to the best students: a system of encouraging the quality training, their competition spirit in learning and obtaining competitive results in the educational process in view of the future qualifications;
- the employers' participation in the educational process: through institutional partnerships, universities can involve them in making, adjusting, adapting the curricula;
- the adaptation of the curricula to the labour market requests and to specific activity areas, for offering students a knowledge and training framework, focused on the development of skills, competencies and qualifications at the quality and performance standards wanted by each company.



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3.1.2. The opening of higher education to employers (3)

- An efficient way for the employers' recruitment policies: the achievement, together with the HEIs, of *data basis* with students and graduates, for the employment selection;
- useful both for universities – help their graduates integrate into the labour market, and for companies – have authorized information about graduates and can assess and select the future employees in accordance with qualification, efficiency and performance criteria;
- this way, universities open the education process to the economic environment, organize the students' speciality practice in high exigency, expertise and qualification conditions, prepare their future graduates' integration into the labour market even during their study period;
- by creating partnerships with universities, through financial involvement, sponsorship systems and private scholarships addressed to students, through their collaboration in the curricula achievement, employers take part in their future employees' quality academic training, in accordance with the labour market standards and their own aims.



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4. Conclusions

- questions marks about the direction of Romanian higher education reform;
- doubts regarding the efficiency of academic education in forming skills, competencies and qualifications for the graduates' integration into the labour market;
- concerns towards the system capacity of producing performance and competitive outcomes;
- fundamental critical issue – if the reform of Romanian higher education, as it is being developed, can attain the Bologna Process goals: qualified and competitive graduates, integrated into the labour market;
- solutions do exist for the rehabilitation of the present situation;
- they imply a legislative and administrative framework for the HE development, a modern and efficient managerial act in the HEIs, a change in the employers' attitude to the cooperation with the academic area, strong partnerships between universities and companies.

Thank you for your attention!