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**SOCIOLOGIA**

*Changing Labour, Changing Universities.  
Case Studies from Romania*

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***Changing Labour, Changing Universities.***  
***Case Studies from Romania***

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## A NEW MIDDLE CLASS ON OLD ACADEMIC GROUNDS: LAW STUDENTS OF THE CLUJ UNIVERSITY IN THE 1930s

ZOLTÁN PÁLFFY<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** One of the main tasks of universities of Central and Eastern Europe is that of forming loyal and reliable citizens ready to fill in the ranks of public service. Educational credentials make for social elevation into the ranks of this peculiarly state-dependent middle class. Law students make the relative majority of those engaged in higher learning in the region all through the first half of the 20th century. Where and when there is an acute need for a new middle class under a new state sovereignty, it is law studies that are notoriously perceived as meant to producing the bulk of it. The University of Cluj in the inter-war period is a case in point. The paper shall put forward a selection of data (from an ample statistical survey of elite formation via upper-level education in Central Europe) on this segment of the student population in the 1930s, setting it against a dramatically changed background (the general one and the local one, as traced in secondary sources): how do Romanians cope with the task of producing this new middle class on old grounds, and what are the unwanted side-effects of such state-related social emancipation mechanisms? And how non-Romanians behave in the new situation?

**Keywords:** elite formation, higher learning, enrolment patterns, nation-building, nationalism, inter-ethnic competition, Transylvanian social history

### Introduction: the general framework

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries can be generally described, particularly in Western Europe, in terms of the rise of the modern educational system<sup>2</sup> and its spectacular expansion, especially of higher learning proper. In this transformation, “a small, homogenous, elite and pre-professional university turned into a large,

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<sup>2</sup> The present paper does not intend to touch on theoretical issues of nationalism unless they can be related to phenomena of “nationalizing” in higher education and the effects it produces in terms of ethno-culturally based recruitment patterns. Similarly, instead of adding up further details to the already ample controversy regarding nationalizing efforts manifest in the doings of the Cluj university pre-war and inter-war situations combined, the paper intends to refine the analysis of enrolment patterns that should bring forth social dimensions of recruitment in a survey that is intended to be cross-ethnic and intra-ethnic in the same time.

diversified, middle-class and professional system of higher learning” (Jarusch, 1983:10). First and most palpable is the up-shooting of enrolment figures, both in absolute and relative terms (that is, enrolment figures proper and these figures related to demographic backgrounds). The self-evident numerical indicator also points at the growing social importance of higher education. While quantitative expansion expressed in enrolment figures and a limited social mobility via higher educational levels did occur in Central and Eastern Europe, too, Western-type institutional diversification and professionalization did not, the lack of them denoting a deficient modernization of the system. Besides, in their close relationship to the emerging modern nation-state, universities become key institutions not only for knowledge production but for strengthening a sense of national and cultural identity as well. (Jarusch, 1983: 11-25)

The emergence of state-engineered expanded educational systems is a crucial break in the history of education in yet another sense. “With the development of a national system<sup>3</sup>, education, for the first time, became closely connected to the state or the political system, it also changed the relationship between education and other social institutions” (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985:328). In the process of producing citizens loyal to their nation, schools in general function as major agents, central to citizen-making. In other words, they produce the emotional basis for the assimilation of a given “raison d’état”, reinforcing in this way the nationalism given in the case of one or another specific state/value system (Wiggin, 1962:3-4).

Education works as an agent of nationalization: it conveys an over-increased stress on national traditions, sometimes even translated into ethno-cultural values. As for Central and Eastern Europe, past conflicts tend to come down to nationalist tensions of the present. Moreover, there is often a sense of lagging behind which is seen to be mirrored in educational matters. Frustrations over backwardness<sup>4</sup> are often compensated by an overt national awareness, a sense of belonging to a given national community, dominant or dominated. Sticking to ethno-cultural tradition helps preserve identity, while modernization is not once seen as a threat to it.

The monopolizing position of the “national language” was associated with an impartment of cultural patterns which were leading pupils and students to the acceptance of and commitment to what has been defined as *national identity* (Mitter, 1993: 112).

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<sup>3</sup> The reference comes from Margaret Archer Scotford.

<sup>4</sup> The term is not meant to imply a mechanically applied East-West comparison. That the former is altogether “lagging behind” and the latter is all “advanced” would grossly oversimplify the issue of modernization itself and it would cover out enticing problem-areas of both Eastern and Western European educational developments. In other words, both areas had their specific problems as regard advancement and, instead of a clear and rigid fault-line between the two, the researcher is faced with a considerable amount of intermingling phenomena. In a similar vein, “modernization” should be perceived as having its own “deficiencies”, no matter and to what extent it applies for either East or West. Besides, modernization should not be thought of in terms of a linear distribution of phases.

Central and Eastern Europe has continuously been in a border-zone position well up into the 20th century. Such positioning has faced peoples of the region with perceived threats or real challenges. Survival of the ethnic community and loyalty to one's "own people" have become thus key issues (Grant, 1969: 33-35; Davies, 1993: 295-296).

Beyond economic stagnation and the lack of political dynamism, countries of the region are habitually characterized by varying degrees of social stagnation, the phenomenon being both cause and effect vis-à-vis backwardness. At least compared to Western Europe (in a somewhat generalizing perspective), most countries of the region reveal varying degrees of what may be called educational impoverishment. That is to say, educational opportunities are scarce for most, and even those existent are lacking in diversity. Thus it may be assumed that once education is but a steep and narrow path to upward mobility, its weight in social dynamics is—contrary to all expectations—even greater. Relatively few ever make for higher learning, and that in a tendentially "national" system of education where the higher the level of formal education, the more comprehensive the involvement of the state and the higher the degree of "national affinity" the student is expected to demonstrate (Grant, 1969:45). Besides, there is hardly any sizeable democratic opening in terms of students' social extraction. As alternative study-tracks are scarce, the competition for traditional tracks is often exacerbated.

Characteristically for the whole Central and Eastern European region, the ethno-national dimension tends to overshadow any other social dimension and it also carries the day in political matters. On its turn, the political dimension tends to overrule purely social concerns or considerations. Changes of sovereignty – that is, shifts in ethno-national dominance - often bring forth discontinuities if not thorough "changes of the guard" in the organization of higher learning. Ups and downs in political domination are translated into spectacular shifts in the ethnic and (to a much lesser extent and always related to 'cultural roots') social extraction of student-body, staff or, for that matter, curricula. What is more, nationalism itself goes thorough qualitative changes as we switch from empire to nation-state, not to mention the manifold consequences that this shift means in terms of higher education.<sup>5</sup>

In inter-war Romania, the nation-state paradigm reshaped the self-identifying goals of ethnic groups, both majorities and minorities. Increased state control was also present in higher education. With a relatively low degree of

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<sup>5</sup> The "national issue" is not a novelty in the period under scrutiny. From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there have been variations of what is broadly termed nationalism here and which have played a consistent role in shaping political and educational goals. Romantic and liberal variations preceded chauvinistic nationalism, the latter of far narrower ends as regards the state-individual relationship, mirrored, among other things, in education. The end product was "totalitarian nationalism" in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through it "the state swelled to such monistic proportions as to be identical with society itself. As there was no society but the national state, so there was no education but that of the citizen" (Brubacher, 1966: 61-62).

autonomy, the formerly Hungarian University of Cluj was endowed with symbolic values specifically relating its fate to the main political issues of the day, often alien to strictly academic considerations. This institution (alike many in the region) was both the target and socio-cultural expression of strivings for and over symbolic domination of the ethnic communities involved.

Once an enlarged territorial framework is given, the series of measures aiming at integration and nationalization in cultural and educational affairs in the inter-war period were part and parcel of the general social revolution intended to be carried out (for reasons considered self-evident by contemporaries) along national lines. The intention to elevate the Romanian element to its “deserved” social position in Transylvania was carried out, among other things, through regional economic policies that first and most aimed at the destitution of the former (Hungarian) ruling elements on an ethnic basis.

The measures taken did alter some of Transylvania’s basic social structure. The land reform redistributed large estates and while it created a Romanian smallholder class, it cut deeply at the economic bases of the Hungarian landed class. Concomitantly, the replacement of the Hungarian bureaucracy with a new Romanian one deprived the former majority of their accustomed social and political positions. To be sure, Hungarians (making up roughly a third of the population of the region to be passed under Romanian sovereignty after the war), the so-called Magyar middle class was grossly over-represented in certain segments. Public administration and justice had a 75%, respectively 76% Magyar presence. Combined data on the ethnic constituency of the functionaries’ cluster (that is, mines, agriculture and transport taken together) reveal an even higher average, around 85%, Magyar presence. Even in the case of notaries and lawyers, we encounter a 63% and 65% Hungarian coverage. Meanwhile Romanians, making up slightly more than a half of the population were markedly under-represented in all the mentioned categories, their share in these never exceeding a third of the one owned by Hungarians (Verdery, 1985: 72).

Yet, in a period marked by the Great Depression, it was not the creation of new white-collar jobs but the occupation of existent positions by ethnic Romanians that seemed the primary task. Economic efficiency fell at best to second place with such measures, largely directed by the Liberals of the *Vechiul Regat* [Old Kingdom].<sup>6</sup>

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6 “... the Liberals represent the outlook and mentality of the Regat, in which, as we said, the business life has always been in the hands of Jews or foreigners. True, they have revolted against this situation, but they have never seriously attempted to transform it. They have instead adopted a sort of glorified gangster policy, allowing the Jews to do the work while contenting themselves with a substantial rake-off. [...] The richer the Jew, the bigger the rake-off. The ‘national’ policy which the Liberals have applied to the minorities in Transylvania has been just the same. The ‘nationalization’ of the minority firms has consisted in the practice of putting in a few Roumanian directors, who are given a packet of free shares, or allowed to buy them at a nominal rate. After this, the average Roumanian director has perfectly content to fill the role of guinea-pig, his contribution to the business being to protect it against the Government. As most of these directors are Liberal politicians, they have usually been able to do so effectively” (Macartney, 1937: 324).

The general outcome of such measures was advantageous for the Old Kingdom element; “Romanianization” in their way did not always mean equal gains to be registered by the Transylvanian Romanian community itself.

In order to successfully dominate, (Transylvanian) Romanians had to construct a new, majority-type identity, one that eventually overemphasized the state-ethnicity relationship. What kind of education would best suit the needs of the now dominating Romanians was a crucial issue.<sup>7</sup> Beyond enthusiastic aspirations to modernize the inherited educational assets, in answering the question, local Romanians seem to have perpetuated the pre-war predilection for theoretical education and the largely state-managed white-collar type career-paths opened up through it, to the disadvantage of vocational training, the private sphere of business, which would present the new ruling element with but meagre chances anyway.<sup>8</sup> Complaints regarding the perceived “passivity” of the centralized state in defending the Romanian national capital in Transylvania were also formulated, together with warnings that if the state would not act properly in this respect, the new generations would not embrace but traditional careers, leaving the door open to “an onslaught of foreigners”. The crisis of the legal profession elicited by formal centralizing measures is brought up as an example in point: it no longer figures as a real calling, it is lacking the usual material security and, worst of all, the professionals involved go through a virtual identity crisis (Livezeanu, 1995: 154, 170, 185-186, 205-207; Hitchins, 1994: 344).

An important role in the officially assumed national social revolution<sup>9</sup> was then assumed by higher education generally, and by the Cluj University in particular. On the one hand, educational credentials were perceived as the classical means of upward social mobility, and implicitly of ethno-social redemption. More

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<sup>7</sup> The challenge is even greater if we consider the fact that over 50% of children were kept unschooled in the Old Kingdom before the war. Romanian children of Transylvania, rural areas included, were better off with regard to sheer primary school attendance (Livezeanu, 1995: 30). Nevertheless, if not confessional ones (like the five secondary schools they had at their disposal, let alone theological training itself), they tended to perceive their schools as de-nationalizing agents. In addition, secondary schooling was by far not as generous with Romanians as the primary one. Gains in social position via education were possible only by a certain amount of “Magyarization.” That is to say, the upwardly mobile non-Hungarian clusters tended to be faced with the need to formally integrate themselves into the “dominant Hungarian element.”

<sup>8</sup> In the long run even white-collar job-openings – part of which appeared through the dismissal of non-Romanians from such posts – proved to be of a limited number. Soon the new Romanian academically trained elite faced unemployment or under-employment.

<sup>9</sup> With all the optimistic (and poorly-grounded) boom in the short run, Greater Romania – just like many other countries of the region – seems to have experienced rather a failure in the long run: nationalising assets did not “revolutionize” and could not solve age-old problems by itself, and the ensuing frustrations prepared an easy way for Right-wing orientations. Even some of those who propose to analyze academic changes in line with social challenges tend to put aside the latter in favour of depicting nationalizing efforts, somewhat mistaken for the modernizing strife (Pușcaș, 1995: 165-170).

university graduates meant a greater degree of *embourgeoisement*, something that the Transylvanian Romanian community did indeed need otherwise. Generally, enrolment figures became one of the chief preoccupations in inter-war Romanian higher education. To be sure, the concern for more graduates soon changed into worries about too many enrollers.

The ensuing rapid growth in student population nationwide already in the 1920s resulted in overcrowding, bad ratio of completion of studies, let alone general frustration, distemper and uncertainty among the educated elite. Between 1914 and 1939, the population of Romania doubled, but the number of the students quadrupled. That alone was neither unique, nor represented the problem in itself. It was the general lagging behind and the lack of consistent modernization and/or diversification of available study-paths that compelled most to perceive state-managed jobs as the only feasible and profitable path that they supposed they were entitled to exactly via higher learning.

### **Law students of the Cluj University**

A sizeable student body nevertheless figured as an important piece of symbolic capital in the minds of political leaders and academic staff alike, let alone the immediate practical result that it implied, that is, producing state officials and trained personnel out of the midst of the ethnic Romanian population of the new province. The flocking of ethnic Romanian candidates to the university (for a while the number of Hungarians candidates was decreased by the severe Matura examination conducted in Romanian beginning with 1925) was only halted in 1934, when harsh measures were adopted to filter the would-be trained elite by way of an entrance examination. Even this attempt to keep enrolment figures under control produced no palpable results except in the case of ethnic minority students, but it failed in the longer run with Romanians themselves.

In his 1939 inaugural speech, rector Ștefănescu-Goangă still voiced the same worries concerning overcrowding as his predecessor, Sextil Pușcariu two decades ago. The rector's criticism went against the lack of selection, which made the serious, laborious students a minority among the student body. Instead, the majority was, especially in the thirties, almost permanently engaged in political rallies, anti-Semitic moves, strikes and scandals. Big rallies - in 1923, 1928, 1933, and 1938-39 - proved to be an almost regular occurrence.

Meanwhile, the ratio of completion of studies (a prominent indication regarding the profitability of "investment" in higher education) depended on the chosen track: the least successful were those enrolled in law, only 8% ever managing to finish their studies nation-wide, while those in letters and philosophy seem to have done best in this regard, an average of 28% completing their studies successfully (the nation-wide average of completion of studies was one success to

nine failures, the worst in that period in all Europe). Faculty-to-student ratios went somewhat the same way: it was the worst at the law faculties (in average 1/121), medium in theology (1/55), 1/34 in letters, with 1/32 as the best for the period registered in the pharmacology department. As for universities, it was in Iași that this latter ratio was the worst nation-wide, and even further worsening in the 1930s (Livezeanu, 1995: 212-216, 235-236).

With all the initial optimism and the aspirations to modernize the Romanian university in Cluj, not much could be done in the long run in this respect. After all, it could have hardly been a feasible project to create an independent, de-politicized scientific workshop in the Western style in Cluj, combining the German and American models, going in parallel with the markedly French traditions and the political involvement manifested by Old Kingdom universities. In vain Rector Sextil Pușcariu (himself coming from the University of Iași) made it evident early in 1920 that the import of such traditions into the newly acquired universities (Cluj and Cernăuți, which by and large followed the German model until the takeover) would create tensions and frustrations on both sides of the Carpathians (Pușcaș, 1995: 122,132). Beyond turning the university into a state-agency of nationalizing and a workshop of national elite-formation, not much seems to have been done in terms of the social dimensions that the university student body either depended on or created itself. Even the inherited academic structure, intra-departmental distribution and curricula went basically unchanged

All the while law studies were the most popular and populated, swelling the ranks of university students to a far greater extent than any other study track in the periods. It may well be assumed that at the universities of Budapest, Cluj/Kolozsvár, Bucharest and Iași taken together, about half of the students chose law, at any rate, almost as many as all the other specializations added together. The trend prevails in the inter-war decades: of the over 30,000 students registered in 1928-1929, 38% were in law, around one quarter of the total in letters, less than a fifth in natural sciences, even fewer in veterinary medicine, pharmacology and theology – 7%, 5% and 4%, respectively. Those opting for medicine were of a mere 1% of the total. As a study-track that did not seem to require full-time attendance, law was the most popular among those seeking state-employment: of the 17,779 degrees produced by Romanian universities in a ten-years' period ranging from 1021/22 to 1931/32, 43% were in law, compared to 29% in letters and philosophy, 16% in natural sciences and mathematics, for instance. (Livezeanu, 1995: 212-215)

The University of Cluj, as a whole, is not an exceptional case in the context of inter-war Romanian higher education and Transylvanian universities, especially in terms of its size, composition and the orientation of its law student contingent. Rather, it is the similarities that seem deceptive for some of the (early) Cluj university leaders, while others sought an even greater similarity with Old Kingdom

patterns. The law faculty recruitment patterns are particularly analogical with those of Iași, the other full-structured provincial university of greater Romania. Nor is the law student contingent or the (inter-departmental) recruitment patterns characteristic to it a novelty as such or a product of Romanian sovereignty: In the pre-war era, the at the time Hungarian university of Transylvania hosted an equally over-sized law department, one which put ethnic minorities in a quantitative disadvantage against a pronounced over-representation of the (ethnically defined) majority (Pálffy, 2005: 203-212; 93-97).

The statistical survey<sup>10</sup> to which we make reference in this paper encompasses the 1918-1948 period. While in several instances we encounter lacunae in *Matricolas* of other departments, documents of this type referring to the law faculty are at our disposal in integrity. The whole contingent numbers 12,624 law students. The yearly distribution along the time-span is surprisingly even: we have 4,712 students for the first decade, that is, 1918-1929, 4,935 for the 1930-1943 period (including the war years, when the Cluj Romanian university took exile to Sibiu), and 2,977 registered students between 1943-1948 (a contingent in which war-time decrease is somewhat compensated for by the presence of law students at the parallel Hungarian university in Cluj (the Bolyai University, founded in 1946).

While we focus on the thirties, we have to bear in mind that the phenomena, patterns and tendencies of enrolment may gain their full meaning only if compared to those encountered with the whole surveyed period and to those seen in the case of other departments. As for the rest of law students, the evenness of yearly numerical distribution is paralleled by a steadiness of distribution along meaningful variables, especially if we think of the 1920s. No dramatic shifts seem to have occurred in the size or composition of the student body of the now Romanian university. Owing to the lacunae encountered with other departments in enrolment lists, a full-fledged comparison to these would hardly be possible. With all these backtracks, the main variables according to which we intend to sketch the internal distribution of the focus-contingent, that is, age, region of birth, gender and ethno-cultural belonging can, even if somewhat indirectly, meaningfully describe the targeted group in terms that, we hope, can help trace the social history of the Cluj university with regard to enrolment patterns, career orientations, academic success, employment perspectives, both inter-ethnically and intra-ethnically. The forthcoming description relies heavily on quantified data. Figures are seldom telling by themselves. It is the correlations

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<sup>10</sup> The comprehensive research, of which the data hereby used are only a small section of, encompassed elite-formation mechanisms and phenomena throughout Central Europe in the period between 1850 and 1950 and was carried out by a team coordinated by Professor Viktor Karády from Central European University. These are the first partial results that the author puts forward, nevertheless avoiding the table-format which contains a set and combination of data on enrolled students at the university of Cluj in the targeted period going much beyond the scope of the present paper in sophistication.

between and combination of the figures that make conclusions possible. All being said, the following is only a selection of such correlations, without the intention of enlisting all the possible details.

If we track the age variable<sup>11</sup> in different combinations with the other variables, a number of conclusions become possible regarding the student body. Correlated data of age of graduation and region of earning one's Matura/Baccalaureate (that is, where available) show that one third of the 1930s law student contingent got their Matura in Southern Transylvania (where there were more ethnic Romanians, the region also including the great majority of the Saxons as well), one third came from Partium and Banat, the remaining from Northern Transylvanian high-schools. The contingent earning their diploma at the earliest estimated possible age is of an average of 43% in each regional category, with irrelevant differences among the regions. Another indirect age-marker is date of birth. The bulk were of course born between 1910 and 1919 (3,461), about one fifth (1,034) in the previous decade, and very few, only around every twenty-fifth enrollee, were born after 1920, with the same small size of the group born before 1899.

Of the 1,587 students having this data registered, more than three quarters earned their Matura between 1929 and 1935, with none of the previous academic years exceeding a yearly average of 10 enrollees. The post-1935 period presents a yearly average of 70 newcomers. Interest in law studies seems to have shrunk considerably after 1935. That is so even we consider that the Oradea Law Academy was melted into the Cluj Law Faculty in 1932 (meaning an additional transfer of around 1,000 students at the outset).

By age of Matura-earning (data registered with 3,339 students out of the total of 4,935 in this temporal cluster), 64.5% earned this degree at or before 19, the rest were of twenty or older. In other words, only half of the registered contingent got their Matura at the age considered as desirable or "normal" (around 18), the delay with the remaining half also accounting for later enrolment and later completion of studies. We may presume that those less successful in academic terms add up delays in high school and university. With only one out of five graduating from high school after the age of 20, we may also presume that prolonging university studies can account for the bigger part of the delay.

As of age of enrolment, (with only 12 missing from the contingent of 4,935, the absolute majority came to the department at ages between 17 and 25, ages 18, 19 and 20 being over 500 in absolute figures, 17 years old early beginners being about 400 (one out of twelve) in number. Latecomers are few, with the latter age contingent – those 26 to 30 years in age – accounting for around 100 enrollees.

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<sup>11</sup> This variable is commonly considered as highly relevant for the degree of success attained in studies, a qualitative marker to be considered both inter- and intra-ethnically. This is why this variable appears in most of the mentioned combinations.

In order to determine students' ethnic extraction, family names are also employed. To be sure, ethnic character of family name alone is prone to bias and misinterpretation, as certain fractions of linguistically Romanian names may hide non-Romanians, for instance. Moreover, ethnic identity as such is much more complex, also involving mother tongue, religious belonging, family relations, being ultimately an issue of self-identification. With all the limitations, it seems purposeful to make use family names as one of the indicators of one's most likely ethnic affiliation, in a combination with other indicators when possible.

Age of enrolment referred to ethnic character of family name presents the following distributions: inter-ethnically, those bearing a Romanian name have a relative majority, 2,421 in absolute numbers. They are followed much from behind by 1,122 Hungarians by name, 692 Germans and 688 "other". In the case of Romanians, 17.5% were enrolled before or at the age of 18, another 25.2% up to the age of 20 (included). Every fourth Romanian student enrolled at the age of 26 or later, 17.6 % going to university after the age of 22. The latter two clusters combined make that four out of ten Romanian students were belated enrollers. As for those with Hungarian names: as many as 34.6% enrolled at an age younger than 20, a somewhat worse ratio as with the Romanians. In the same way, the late-comer part is just a little bit larger than with the previous group. 36% of those belonging to the German-sounding name cluster begin their studies at a normal age, with about the same amount of late-comers. It seems that it is them who begin relatively early. The question is whether they end their studies in due time or not. It seems plausible that Hungarians take a longer time to take their Matura, but once they have it, they are not prone to prolong university studies. Still, they are near not so fast, that is, successful in academic pursues than Germans and, especially and rather expectedly, Jews.

Ethnic background indicators put forward another issue: a massive numerical dominance of the student contingent cluster registered by Romanians, something which comes up several times in the other combination of variables. As a remarkable feat, Romanians literally reversed the order to their advantage as regards ethnic composition. Before the war, the then majority Hungarians made up around 80% of the whole student body, with Romanians being grossly under-represented. Shortly after the war, it is Romanians who make up more than 70% of the students, with minority Hungarians losing most of their positions. Other non-majority groups like Jews and Germans seem to have maintained their numerical representation and intra-ethnic social selection standards, pre-war and inter-war situations combined (Pálffy, 2005: 97-112). As regards the often-quoted losses encountered by the ethnic Hungarian community in terms of elite-production, one should not forget that comparing their inter-war situation to the pre-war one is at least misleading: for evident reasons, they were unnaturally

over-represented while they were a political majority within the academically-based elite (the size of which elicited worries among Hungarians themselves in the pre-war decades).

Even though the age of enrolment according to declared native tongue can be followed only with around half of the basic cluster, the ratio of early beginners seems highest with Hungarians and Germans by native tongue, medium with the “other” category (very small in absolute figures, though), while Romanians present a relatively even distribution among the age-categories, yet they seem to be prone to begin studies at a later average age than Hungarians/Germans.

This phenomenon is mirrored by another combination of variables as well. Enrolment according to region of birth shows that those coming from Romania proper, 244 in number are older when they enrol than those from any other region. While only 18% of them enrol under the age of 20, 41% enrol very late, at or after the age of 26, while an additional 17.2 % enrol at ages between 23 and 25, making two out of three arrive at Cluj as late beginners.

Those 2,429 born in Transylvania are relatively the youngest: a little more than one third is to be found in the first, early beginner age category, with a little less than one third in the late beginner category. With 1,376 students, those born in Banat and Partium are in between the former two. Hungary (not once the term denotes former Hungarian territories) and “other” as place of birth are but a mere 193 and 42, respectively, yet even these two locations seem to have sent students of law to Cluj at an earlier age than that of those born in Romania (that is, the Old Kingdom). Beyond considerations of age, this territorial distribution is very much telling in another respect: the pool of recruitment of the Cluj Law Faculty remained an overwhelmingly local one. Few were coming from outside of the newly acquired Western territories (that is, Transylvania proper together with Banat and Partium), foreign citizens were very rare exceptions. All put together, the number of those born elsewhere never exceeds one tenth of the total of 2,429 with a registered birthplace.

Geographical proximity in general and being situated in urban areas in particular seem to offer advantages, irrespective of ethnic background. Besides, while there was a considerable effort made to compensate for the pre-war under-representation of ethnic Romanians among Transylvanian town-dwellers, in the latter part of the inter-war period there was still a relative over-representation of Hungarians, Jews and Germans in urban areas. Having in view the social and economic circumstances, it is very likely that both those beginning and graduating university at an early age came from the towns rather than from rural areas, even towns from outside of the region.

If we relate age of enrolment to confession, we encounter a pattern highly similar to the ones seen in the pre-war age: Israelites are the youngest relative enrollers, together with Evangelicals. Protestants follow suit, while

Roman Catholics and those of the two Romanian faiths –Greek Catholics and Orthodox – present (much in the same order) the oldest relative cluster of enrollers.

Regarding the year of completion of studies, we have a total of 2,406 cases when completion (or termination or halting them at an advanced stage) of studies is ever registered. The peak years were 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1943, when a little over 300 students received some kind of degree, on average. The late mid-thirties produce the bulk of diploma-owners, since this was the other end of the wave of enrolment encountered approximately four-five years earlier. The leap from 1938 to 1943 is due to war-time conjecture, just as 1943 as a top-year of diploma issuing at the law department is related to the shifts in political dominance occurred in the early forties.

If we relate age of completion of studies to confession of graduates, we encounter some unexpected, yet rather small differences. Of the 136 Roman Catholics, 34.6% graduate at or before 23 and 38.2% after 25. The 91 Calvinists are distributed roughly in the same manner as regards intra-confessional age clusters. The 42 Israelites prove to be the earliest and youngest degree-owners, Evangelicals following only very slightly behind. Beyond these seemingly usual patterns, we have those of the “other” confessional category, where the absolute majority is made up of Orthodox and Greek Catholic students, who were overwhelmingly Romanian. Out of the 1,084 students listed in these confessional groups, 30.0% graduated before or at the age of 23, thus slightly fewer than the percentage for the other confessions, embraced mostly by Hungarians, Jews and Germans. Correspondingly, slightly more, i.e. 46.9% ended their studies after the age of 25. Put otherwise, roughly two thirds of Romanians were able to obtain the degree only at the price of prolonging their studies.

A more refined intra-ethnic analysis, one contrasting Greek Catholic and Orthodox Romanian law students would be very interesting, yet it is not available so far. Studies encompassing the pre-war era (more precisely, medical students of the Cluj University), nevertheless demonstrate that, in general, Greek Catholic Romanians were the more prone to choose lay career paths that better integrated them into the (by then Hungarian) majority society; by that time Greek Catholic Romanians manifested a slightly more pronounced general inclination towards *embourgeoisement* than their Orthodox Transylvanian co-nationals (Karády and Nastasă, 2004: 91-99). They seemed slightly more open for lay careers as such than their Orthodox co-nationals, even exceeded them in terms of academic success measured as ages of enrolment or graduation (although Greek Catholics were still exceeded in this latter regard by all the other confessions, embraced mostly by other ethnic groups).

Again, if we relate age of graduation to region of birth of students, we have those from the Old Kingdom graduating with a considerable delay, two out of three finishing at or after the age of 26, while only roughly 1 out of 3 Transylvanian-

born graduates (all confessions or ethnic groups included) are “old” when they graduate. Transylvanian Romanians tend to graduate earlier than their Old Kingdom colleagues while non-Romanian Transylvanians (especially Jews and Germans) have a slight advantage even over Romanians coming from the newly acquired Western territories. Nevertheless, this set of data has considerable parts missing, the cross-tabulation being possible only for a little less than half of all the registered cases.

According to age and declared native tongue we get the following split: of the 164 Hungarians, only one out of four did not graduate at or before 25, in other words, having only one out of four to be a late graduate is a remarkable feat under the circumstances. Of the 61 Germans by native tongue only six (only every tenth) graduated in the “late” category. Romanians are but slightly ‘older’ than Hungarians when graduating: of the 435, 74,6 % graduated at or before 25, the remaining one quarter after that. As for the other mentioned ethnic marker, family name, we have an almost even distribution of age-categories, both inter- and intra-ethnically. All non-age clusters taken together, very few graduate before the age of 22 (7,4 %), the bulk, every second law student, earn their degree between the age of 22 and 27, to be considered the characteristic graduation age-cluster with law students, a somewhat higher age than what one could expect generally or in comparison to other departments. In addition, every fifth of the law students graduated at a pronouncedly advanced age, that is, between 27 and 33, the remaining are special cases, especially the 5 % earning their degree after 39 years of age.

Last but not least, the age variable can be related to the gender variable. Out of the 4,923 cases listed, 863 men enrolled at the earliest possible age, 551 around a year later (together: around 32 %), while a massive figure (roughly 50%) of the men enrolled with several years’ delay (at the age of 23 and later, 1,996 male students). In the case of women, the female group totalling 444 enrolled, age ratios are the other way round: almost half had the early graduation age, less than 20% were recorded in the late enrolment cluster. On average, women tended to enrol at an earlier age, and they were less prone to enrol at a late age. As for the status of the female law student, it is telling that only every eleventh student was a woman, the law department, the least “feminized” of all, being perhaps the most conservative in this regard as well. Other departments seem more open as regards female enrollers, while the law track looked most rewarding for the conservative-minded segment of the would-be learned elite.

If we take a look at the cross-tabulation containing gender and confession, it is somewhat surprising that the Roman Catholic and Protestant contingents included the smallest intra-confessional percentage of women, followed by the two “Romanian faiths” at a considerable distance to the advantage of women – against the less than one percent with the first two confessional clusters, these latter two accumulated an average of over 6% female students in the intra-

confessional combination. The Evangelical female student share is even better, if only expressed in percentage, and, not at all surprisingly, we find 47 women and 208 men among the Israelite contingent, almost every fifth of this cluster being women. Against all odds, Jews, although less over-represented than before, are once again the relatively most successful in their studies and most versatile in options. Similarly, we have 247 women among the 2,286 considered as graduated, that is to say, female students were not lost on the way, their share among diploma-owners even increasing, thinly but visibly (that is, if compared to their representation on the undergraduate level). Put otherwise, women had higher probability to eventually graduate, as compared to men.

It is remarkable that neither the gender, nor the ethnic distribution of law students changed significantly from the 1920s to the 1930s. In a similar vein, territorial belonging of students, as indicated by the place of Matura-granting school, registered in 3,093 cases presents a rather even distribution of students territorially: Partium and Banat gave 29.9%, Northern Transylvania 35.4%, Southern Transylvania 34.4 %. Amazingly few students earned their Matura elsewhere, yet another indicator of the markedly local demand that the Cluj law faculty answered throughout the inter-war period, even if we take territorial distribution as place of birth: the virtually complete contingent for the thirties has 46.1% born in Transylvania, 29.6 in Partium and Banat, 7.5% in Hungary, 14.9 % in Romania, with an infinitely small number registered as born “elsewhere”.

Interestingly enough, in the official discourse of university leaders the relative degree of tolerance demonstrated vis-a-vis non-Romanians (basically meaning Hungarians and Jews) or, for that matter, women worked as a basis for boasting the open and democratic character of the Cluj university in the twenties. Yet by the mid-thirties the enrolment figures demonstrating a sizeable ethnic minority presence (Jews being the main concern this time) were eagerly re-interpreted as a chief worry and as threatening the positions of the Romanian element.

### **Concluding remarks**

The enrolment patterns, size and internal distribution along relevant variables met with the Cluj law student contingent of the thirties are the result of state-sponsored ethnic competition within a non-diversified market: with little room for alternative professional clusters, would-be educated elites have to accommodate with traditional paths of upward social mobility, among which law is the main segment, a study-track that went through a veritable re-ethnicization. Enrolment ratios according to ethnic background are altogether reversed, Romanians quickly gain the upper hand, Hungarians encounter severe setbacks, while Jews and Germans seem to have maintained pre-war standards and by and large produced patterns that characterized these ethnic clusters

before the war as well. It is notable that while political sponsorship on ethnic grounds produced significant quantitative results in the case of the now majority Romanians, many of the qualitative aspects – curricula and the “inherited” so-called traditional study-tracks not allowing for new departments – were pretty much resembling those encountered with ethnic Romanians before. Notwithstanding their small numbers among the students, it was Jews and Germans that fared relatively best in terms of academic success, followed by Hungarians, while Romanians on average did not manage to live up to the great expectations of the early twenties. To be sure, the undertaken nationalizing efforts could not have so thoroughly and so quickly changed the socio-historical and ethno-cultural backgrounds from which Romanians came from.

The main target of the Romanian “cultural offensive” launched by the Liberal Party based in *Vechiul Regat* [the Old Kingdom] was to unify Romanians as a nation via getting rid of regional boundaries and enhancing the positions of Romanians in general. Social boundaries or the situation of the peasantry, by far the most numerous layer of society, were not among the main preoccupations. Not once in educational matters, the expansion that the strife for “cultural offensive” meant in practice entailed dilution, that is, a set-back to quality. The long-term result of unifying nationalization was the overall politicization of the academic sphere (Livezeanu, 1995: 35, 37).

The consequences were to be felt in university finances, the eligibility criteria of academic staff, students' guided career-choices and the perspectives of a professional career. It was in the thirties that anti-Semitic and xenophobic drives came to full dimensions and their consequences unfolded: repeated attempts to remove the “alien” element, especially Jews, but Hungarians as well, to the intended advantage of the “autochthonous element” (that is, native Romanians) both in the academic sphere proper and in the overall setup of the white-collar job-market depending on academic qualifications.

It did not seem to have occurred to the concerned officials that merely reversing ethnic domination directions while going on with pre-war enrolment and career-choice patterns would eventually reproduce the structural deficiencies met with that pattern. Once again modernization and social emancipation is mistaken for a sheer numerical boom, a quantitative leap clearly putting forward the need of the Romanian element to “modernize” its class-structure (otherwise an evident and normal need in the changing economic context), that is, raise a considerable middle-class layer using time-honoured academic grounds, law studies par excellence. Malfunctions and redundancies were imbedded in the (re)produced scheme, while the other way, modernizing society via modernizing higher learning (introducing new study-track, like polytechnic education) proved to be a hardly feasible project under the circumstances of state-engineered nation-building integration efforts that carried the day in the period. To be sure, neither Hungarians nor Romanians seemed to be prone to intra-ethnic social dynamism.

While the first produced some degree of retrenchment via law studies, the latter could witness some democratic opening limited, to be sure, to the first generation of students, of this or the other study-tracks, so much desired otherwise in the theory of the envisaged national revolution.

Generally, for the first three decades of the 20th century, career-choices were not strategic in the sense that they closely followed the ephemeral tides of conjuncture. The job-market was dominated by the state in such a manner that made any other alternative limited in scope, if not altogether unrealistic.<sup>12</sup> Diplomas were assumed to assure a better living standard, and higher educational credentials were considered to override lower academic qualifications. The inflation of educational credentials resulted in qualitative unemployment. Once those with Matura were pushed out from the job market by those holding a post-secondary degree, and the latter, in their turn, were pushed out by university graduates, the only chance that the educated had to earn a living was to accept positions even considerably lower than what their degrees would have normally entitled them for.<sup>13</sup> Beyond the imminent threat of social decay, this led to further distress and frustration, ultimately channelled into xenophobic drives.

Law is traditionally and with a conspicuous notoriety one of the most popular (if not the most popular) and most populated study-tracks. While it seems to involve a relatively low level of investment in terms of intellectual innovation or technical support (it is a “cheap” study-track and degree, compared, for instance, with medical studies) this is the “gentlemanly department” allowing pursuers formal social elevation or the maintaining of such positions.<sup>14</sup> Dependence on the characteristically state-administered job-market makes the attained social

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<sup>12</sup> The decline in the interest on the part of industrialist to employ academically trained personnel may be accounted for by the fact that these were usually elitist and over-politicised. Anyway, industry and public utilities offered the academically trained only a fraction of the entries they reserved for non-academic white collar personnel in the 1920s (Kovács, 1994: 73). While presenting a much similar setup, inter-war Romania job-assignment mechanisms often denied a priority of non-professional considerations, political and other types of clientelism, for instance.

<sup>13</sup> Contemporary Hungarian statistics and sociological research was rather keen on this issue. (Kornis, 1934: 2, 33; Laky, 1931a: 35; Laky, 1931b: 43 – 47)

<sup>14</sup> There is a considerable resemblance with the by now destitute Transylvanian Hungarian middle class. The class-character of the Hungarian state bureaucracy (by which prevalent social roots the Magyar civil service employees were not quite alone in the region) also functioned as a model of social status and ascendancy for two other social groups related to it: the learned elites and the urban, more capitalist-oriented middle stratum, a good part of which were affiliated by specific goals and mentality to the ‘gentlemanly’ wage-earners. With them, office and job were evaluated according to their status in society and to how close this status was to the historic one of the nobility. The prevalent view was that (in contrast to the lower status associated to the entrepreneurial and free professional class) the career of the intellectual class could attain its full “gentlemanly” dimension only if it was rooted in the hierarchy of state-employed officials and service elites. The social value of the learned professions was not so much inherent in their professionalism, that is, making specialized knowledge operational, but in the position they were entitled in the state-bureaucracy (Erdei, 1981: 203-219).

position (reached through academic credentials) to be itself dependant on the state, not to mention political issues of the day. The anomaly – a state-orchestrated “middle class” – makes for over-emphasized loyalty, assuming the “proper” political orientation. It ultimately pushes sheer professional considerations into the background, while the ethnic dimension overshadows the social one.

Except for ephemeral intermezzos, the “revolutions” that occurred in this part of Central and Eastern Europe were not social but national in essence, a feature of defective modernity directly reflected in (if not induced by) malfunctions of the educational system. Ethnic competition is exacerbated and taken for structural improvement. Needless to say, modernization is a totally alien perspective anyway, if not a direct threat to national identity, for autochthonist ideologues who regard ethno-national self-containment and self-preservation as basic concepts. Embedded in this perception is the recurrent tendency to diminish the role of intra-group social selection and effective promotion on meritocratic, professional or, least of all, market-oriented grounds. Meanwhile, in the face of a perceived historic challenge, neither state nor nation would ever hear of assimilation as a means of integration. The state-forming majority was to be integrated instead, exclusionary drives and dissimilation being considered as natural, lawful and self-evident strategies. In the form many of inter-war state-nations sought it, self-integration tended to imply rightist political radicalization. It is by no coincidence that the *numerus clausus* law in Hungary or the Iron Guard movement in Romania had student political distemper at their starting-point. In both cases, radicalization follows a usual path, social and professional dissatisfactions are easily translated into political extremism. In the process of elite-formation carried out via the expansion of the category of those with higher degrees, academic or professional considerations tended to slip into the second place.

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## COMPETITIVENESS AND RESEARCH-ORIENTED TEACHING IN ROMANIAN UNIVERSITIES: THE NEO-LIBERAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

SORIN GOG<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** This paper focuses on the recent neo-liberal transformation in the Romanian education system and analyzes the genealogy of a new form of academic governance that has been implemented in higher education institutions in the past decade. It examines the role quality indicators and supplementary funding have played in the gradual embedding and naturalization of neo-liberal disciplinary reforms in universities and the specific quality enhancement policies that aimed at increasing the productivity of academic workers by stimulating the competition among them. The main argument of the paper is that in order to understand the extensive academic management based on scientometrics and recurrent evaluation of academics we need to look at the structural mechanisms that have shaped higher education institutions in accordance with market rules and at the generalization of competitiveness throughout the system in the context of budget cuts and decreasing resources allocated to education.

**Keywords:** higher education governance, quality assurance, neo-liberalism, scientometrics, academic competitiveness

### Introduction: scientometrics and academic productivity

During the second semester of the 2014/2015 academic year, the Rector of Babeş-Bolyai University<sup>2</sup> notified all academic staff through a written disposition<sup>3</sup> that both tenured and non-tenured employees (short term contracts up to three years) were required to update their research and artistic activity reports on the university's electronic platform. The document also reminded everyone that the national and international ranking of the university as well as the core funding allocated to each higher education institution was dependent on the research

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<sup>2</sup> *Babeş-Bolyai University (BBU) is the largest public university from Romania. It is located in Cluj-Napoca in Transylvania and it is known for its multi-cultural and multi-language study programs.*

<sup>3</sup> *[http://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/info/infoUBB/files/InfoUBB\\_2015\\_02/Dispozitie%20de%20serviciu%20privind%20incarcarea%20activitatii%20de%20cercetare%20pe%20platforma%20Managementul%20Cercetarii\\_CA\\_04.02.2015.pdf](http://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/info/infoUBB/files/InfoUBB_2015_02/Dispozitie%20de%20serviciu%20privind%20incarcarea%20activitatii%20de%20cercetare%20pe%20platforma%20Managementul%20Cercetarii_CA_04.02.2015.pdf) [last accessed: 03.05.2015].*

activities of its staff. The written disposition concluded with an administrative admonition: “If you do not fulfil this obligation until the deadline as it was communicated to you, one of the disciplinary procedures contained in Law 1/2001 will be set in motion against you” (Hot. CA 2054/04.02.2015). In the recent history of Babeş-Bolyai University, this was a cautionary language of unprecedented strength issued by the Administrative Council<sup>4</sup>, aimed at mobilizing all academic staff to report their research in the institutional established evaluation forms.

Shortly after this, the Rector issued a new written disposition<sup>5</sup>, this time to take issue with those that did not report the required amount of publications. Currently this is set at three publications for a three year period (Hot. SEN 405/03.12.2012 and Hot. CA 2882/17.02.2014), but this has never been seriously enforced in the University until now. The new notification carefully listed all the articles and paragraphs from the National Education Law that referred to *teaching* but also to *research norms* for academic staff, to the University Charter, Senate decisions and pointed out to the legal duties of employees to fulfil their contractual obligations. It invoked a strong legal grounding and it made no shortage of showing that it has all the required legitimacy to act the way it did. Then it firmly asked all deans and heads of departments to acknowledge that, according to a decision taken the previous academic year<sup>6</sup>, it was their duty and obligation to implement the necessary measures in order for faculty members to fulfil the specified minimum research requirements. Referring to his legal attribute as manager of the University, the rector demanded the following steps to be taken: the deans (together with the heads of departments) of the 22 faculties were asked to nominate a local *disciplinary committee* that the Rector’s Office would forward to the University Senate for approval; all deans had to submit three separate lists to the Rector’s Office: one with all academics that did not report any publications for 2014, a second with all the academics that had an average number of less the three publications for the 2012-2014 period, and a third list with academics that did not report any publications during the last three years. The written notification concluded once again with a strong, almost military language, stating that the infringement and non-compliance with these directives constitute a “violation of hierarchical orders” (Hot. CA 2627/ 11.02.2015).

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<sup>4</sup> The Administrative Council is the executive branch of the University and it is composed of the rector, vice-rectors, and faculty deans of BBU.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/info/infoUBB/files/InfoUBB\\_2015\\_02/Decizie%20privind%20incarcarea%20activitatii%20de%20cercetare%20pe%20platforma%20Managementul%20Cercetarii\\_11.02.2015.pdf](http://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/info/infoUBB/files/InfoUBB_2015_02/Decizie%20privind%20incarcarea%20activitatii%20de%20cercetare%20pe%20platforma%20Managementul%20Cercetarii_11.02.2015.pdf) [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/info/infoUBB/files/InfoUBB\\_2014\\_02/HCA%20privind%20publicatiile%20aferente%20componentei%20de%20cercetare%20din%20norma%20universitara%20nr%202882%20din%2017-02-2014.pdf](http://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/info/infoUBB/files/InfoUBB_2014_02/HCA%20privind%20publicatiile%20aferente%20componentei%20de%20cercetare%20din%20norma%20universitara%20nr%202882%20din%2017-02-2014.pdf). Retrieved from: <http://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/info/infoUBB/> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

The disciplinary process is still pending, but the initial idea was that the local disciplinary committees would evaluate each single case and would implement specific sanctions against academic staff together with the Senate and the Administrative Council – these punitive measures would range from written admonitions to the actual increase of teaching load. These disciplinary procedures and this instantiation of hierarchical control mechanisms related to academic productivity are also unprecedented in the recent history of the University. The number of research publications required from each staff member is not much given the existing formal requirements and types of publication accepted to be taken into consideration by the University. Nevertheless we should take a step back and notice how the internal quality assessment process that was started a few years ago was now completing a full cycle and was gradually transformed into what it actually was meant to be: an apparatus for standardizing, measuring and comparing academic performance that is instrumental for a neo-liberal reform of higher education that relies on a full implementation of scientometrics in order to articulate a new form of management based on competitiveness and the relocation of resources to those academic institutions that are more willing to implement market-oriented reforms. Part of these transformations is the constitution of an extensive disciplinary mechanism that individuates and makes each single academic a responsible and accountable member of the “sustainable” and “productive” academic environment. The implementation of these neo-liberal technologies of knowledge production in the higher education institutions at the periphery of European Union and the way the integration of these countries into the Single European Market has impacted the existing education systems are still pending a thorough ethnography.

Gradually, at Babeş-Bolyai University, as well as throughout the Romanian academia, a digitalized system has been set up to meticulously quantify the most detailed movements in the academic space. Initially, the online system appeared as a handy and modern(izing) tool to organize one’s research activity while allowing access to it from everywhere. It soon turned into a device that required every member to report and categorize their academic activity. The online system distinguished between types of publications and it carefully differentiated between the ranks of these publications: for example, the papers published in scientific journals were differentiated according to their level of prestige - ISI publications (abbreviation for Institute for Scientific Information owned by the Thomson Reuters Corporation), IDB publications (International databases – other than ISI), CNCSIS publications (national databases) and other Romanian publications. Published books were also ranked according to four hierarchical categories which distinguished for example between “recognized” international publishing houses such as Cambridge University Press, Blackwell or Sage and

other international publishing houses. The production of local knowledge in vernacular languages and the dissemination of research to national stakeholders was gradually devaluated by the institutionalized requirement to publish in international trade languages and international publishing houses. The data collection also codified conference proceedings (using a similar ranking system as journal publications), edited volumes, translations, grants and other institutional projects. Furthermore, it asked for grant applications you submitted to be mentioned, even those that did not receive financing or are still pending review, so that it could measure how industrious employees are. The 'scientific prestige' of academics was measured in a comprehensive and meticulous manner: membership in research centres, professional associations, editorial boards, conference committees, doctoral committees, awards received, guest lectures at international or national universities, project expertise, appearances in the public sphere etc.

Because of the low integration of local evaluation systems with the national ones, university employees are periodically asked to fill in additional evaluation reports that require other complex performance indicators such as number and types of citations of personal publications, calculate the impact of these citations through the Hirsch index, quantify the new directions of study programs in university that each individual academic has initiated, the creation of new courses for students, number of BA and MA supervised thesis, the contribution to studies that ground or evaluate public policies etc. These evaluative systems grow more complex each year and have become an important managing tool for all public administrators that deal with higher education governance. What it is important to point out is not only the wide diversification and quantification of these evaluative indicators but the construction of devices that enable a macro-micro scaling of performance: the insertion of all higher education institutions into a common classifying grid which enables the identification of those national universities that perform under the global average or the specific research dimensions that are malfunctional and, at the same time, single out those exact academics from the specific departments belonging to one of the faculties that has not been productive enough. The above mentioned written notifications that were sent out by the Rector and the disciplinary procedures set in motion against those that had not fulfilled the research quota need to be understood as a function of the successful concatenation of the intersecting macro-micro devices which have been introduced in the Romanian academic institution as standard(izing) managing tools.

Not only has the research done by universities been dealt with through the institutionalization of scientometrics, but teaching activities have also undergone the same transformations. A common feature of each semester is the possibility of an electronic evaluation by students of each course or seminar taught by academics

which enable heads of departments and deans to identify how students perceive the performance of each employee. Initially, the student's evaluation was designed as an instrument for feed-back that professors could consult to improve their curricula, readings, level of intelligibility and class performance. Attempts have been made to incorporate these evaluations into how employees are financially remunerated within each department, but due to the general freezing of wages this attempt has been temporarily blocked. Nevertheless, the new Educational Law adopted by Parliament explicitly specifies that the evaluation of courses by students is mandatory and that this has to be incorporated in deciding how professors are remunerated, along with other performance criteria. (Law of National Education 1/2011, Art. 303: 1,2,3).

In addition, the feed-back functions of evaluation have been dealt with in a more direct and controlling manner. As of 2014/2105 academic year, Babeş-Bolyai University implemented a national requirement issued by ARACIS<sup>7</sup> which asked each single department to organize 'inter-collegial' evaluation sessions. This meant that each academic year, 25% of the department's staff had to be evaluated by peers and that this would be a permanent activity that would be rerun every four years. The evaluation committee was set up by colleagues from the department, approved by the head of the department and dean and would have to reflect the existing (power) structure: junior-lecturers and lecturers could be evaluated by all academics, assistant-professors and full-professors only by colleagues of a similar rank. The evaluation focused on three aspects: teaching, research and administration. The evaluated academic had to receive a grade for distinct dimensions of each of the three aspects<sup>8</sup>. All this data is centralized by a specialized institution belonging to the University: the Centre for Academic Development and Quality Management.

It is important to notice how extensive the evaluation of University's employees is becoming and the fine tuning it operates in order to take each single dimension of academic activity into consideration, not only in terms of

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<sup>7</sup> The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), [www.aracis.ro](http://www.aracis.ro).

<sup>8</sup> For example, "teaching" meant the evaluation by peers of the specific portfolio of each course and the way it was organized, the scientific content of the course, the resources for learning that the professor made available to students, the way the evaluated professor interacted with students, the communication skills and the system of grading students that was employed. The "research" aspects were operationalized in three dimensions: national and international publications, the active involvement in research grants and professional prestige (measured in terms of belonging to different professional association or participation at scientific events). The "administrative" aspects were also well covered by the evaluation procedure: how each member fulfilled their official institutional duties, the involvement in the particular administrative tasks existing in the department (the partaking in the creation of reports required by the university was emphasized as well) and, finally, the involvement in organizing scientific events or services for the community.

research, but in terms of teaching and administrative work as well. It operates through a genuine surveillance mechanism that mobilizes co-workers to analyze, evaluate and measure the professional activity of each individual member of the department. In what follows I would like to explore the structural mechanisms behind this process of extensive evaluation and the reasons why it has escalated in recent years. My main argument is that this is related to a radical neo-liberal reform of higher education in Romania and to the implementation of a new form of academic governance in which all employees are disciplined, put under surveillance and penalized in order to become responsible and hardworking members of a market-oriented enterprise that is capable of supplying competitive educational services.

### **Funding of the Higher Education System and internal quality assurance mechanisms**

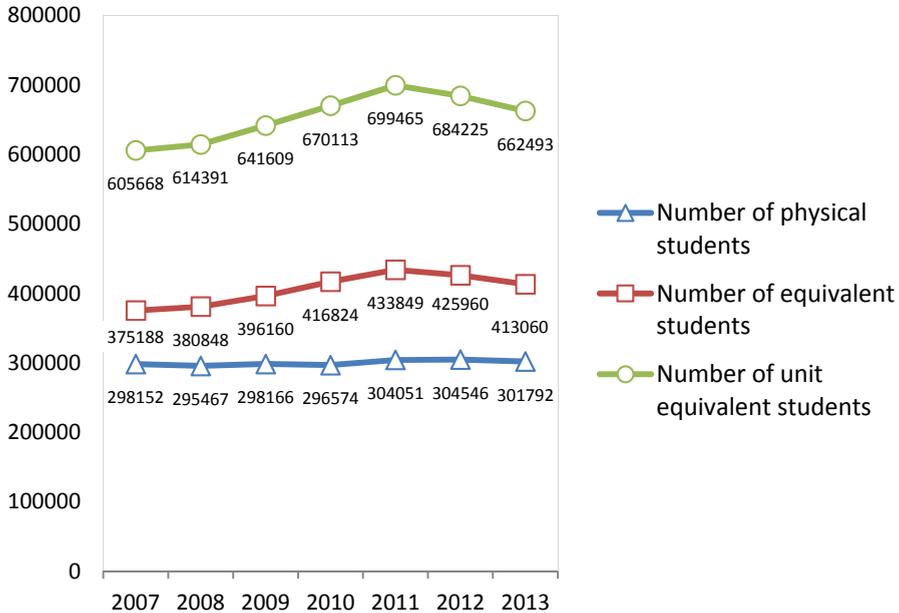
In order to understand these transformations we have to take a look at the way higher education institutions have been financed in Romania and the new mechanisms of budget allocations that have been set in motion in the past seven years. I would like to focus on the notion of “supplementary funding” (*finanțare suplimentară*) or funding based on academic “excellence”, that received a growing attention in the documents produced by the National Higher Education Funding Council (CNFIS) who acts, according to the Law of National Education as the institution that provides official assessments and expertise to the Ministry of Education when it comes to the distribution of financial resources among universities. One of the main reasons why the radical neo-liberal reforms have been so easily naturalized by governance bodies, professors and trade unions alike is the fetishization of supplementary funding and the idea that institutions that produce more and better scientific research are worthy of an additional allocation of resources to reward their academic prowess. This idea has become so strongly embedded in the every-day life of academic institutions that it was relatively unnoticed that this actually never happened and that behind this language of meritocracy a complex device of academic productivity enhancement was hidden that aimed at rationalizing costs, disciplining labour and instilling competition among academics – reforms which have the potential to produce a more precarious working environment. I will try to show how there is no such thing as supplementary funding in the sense of extra-funding for excellence that is allocated on top of the core-funding, only a zero-sum game that actually redistributes resources among higher-education institutions based on the brutal market logic of survival of the fittest and annihilation of the weakest.

The institution responsible for quality assurance in Romania has been from the early 90's the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEEA), in charge of the accreditation of universities and new study programs. In the context of a massive numeric explosion of private universities but also of new lines of study provided by state universities, the Council was responsible for evaluating the institutional capacity of higher institutions, for offering qualitative educational services and for the legal accreditation of degrees. In 2005 this body was replaced by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance (ARACIS) that was mandated by Parliament to be in charge of all external evaluation of national universities. ARACIS is a full member of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, a network of European institutions which is responsible for implementing the European standards in higher education in all countries that underwent the Bologna Process. This means that national policies of quality assurance are continuously synchronized with European ones. Given the growing complexity of the evaluation of higher education operated by ARACIS and the fact that this process became mandatory for all universities and is recurrently applied to all study programs, the institution would play an important role in the implementation of quality standards and evaluation of the national education enterprises.

From the perspective of those managing the education system and educational policy makers, bodies such as CNEEA and ARACIS can be responsible for the external evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions, while having only a limited impact on the internal quality assurance mechanisms. From this point of view, once a university or study program would receive the required accreditation it would not have a lasting incentive to further its quality development and enhance the educational services it offers (Stavaru, 2012: 112-113). These evaluations were done recurrently and this means that all universities are more or less compelled to implement quality assurance procedures – but what the governors of education find problematic is the fact that this might induce a threshold-mentality and could lead to the rationalization of efforts and limitation to fulfilling solely the externally imposed standards. This is why an internal mechanism of assurances was implemented as well, and, in order for higher education institutions to have genuine motives to internalize these reforms, parts of the core funding were conditioned by their incorporation. This is what bodies such as National Higher Education Funding Council (CNFIS) are responsible for – to evaluate and monitor the implementation of internal quality standards in higher education institutions and propose the allocation of funding in accordance with the public policies pertaining to quality assurance of educational services.

Let us take a look at how these quality indicators have changed in the past decade under the supervision of CNFIS and the impact they had on the funding of higher education institutions. A major turning point in the distribution of funds took place in 1999 when the funding was allocated based on block-grants, cost-differentiation mechanisms and material costs associated with different types of study programs (Curaj et al., 2015: 6). The block-grants given to universities generated a de-centralization process in managing costs related to higher education and enabled them to have a larger autonomy in terms of how these funds were internally allocated (*Analiza*, 2008: 2). This new mode of governance was operational between 1999 and 2001 (for 3 years) and it introduced a few important concepts that were instrumental in distributing the financial resources among universities up to the present time. In order to standardize managerial accounting and enable a resource allocation based on the different types of costs involved in the educational process, two types of coefficients were set up. The equivalence coefficient (*coeficient de echivalare*) expressed the fact that the level of education (bachelor, masters, doctoral) and the language of education (Hungarian, German, English and other international trade languages) required different type of efforts and corresponding resources. The cost coefficient (*coeficient de cost*) expressed the different material costs involved in each domain of studies: a Film student, for example, would require more resources in order to be educated (coefficient = 9 in 2002) then, let's say, a student in Sociology (coefficient = 1 in 2002). Both these coefficients enable the computing of two standardizing units that were employed in order to allocate the financial resource to universities based on the weight of these two types of factors and the number of corresponding students it managed to attract: allocation per equivalent student (*alocație per student echivalent*) and allocation per unit equivalent student (*alocație per student echivalent unitar*). We will come back to these indicators in the last section of this paper. The chart below shows the evolution of the numbers of students in public universities who received state-financed education (public universities are also allowed to act as private enterprises and offer educational services to students who can afford to cover their own costs – the exact number of self-paying student places is regulated each year by ARACIS). We can see that the number of budgeted slots allocated by the state to public universities had only a slight variation (from 2007 to 2013 it increased with 3640 places), but that the number of equivalent and unit equivalent students registered big fluctuations. This is mainly caused by the overall numeric increase of MA and PhD students and by the overall nature of the fields, levels and language of study for which money is allocated.

**Figure 1.** The evolution of the number of students receiving free tuition in public universities (“budgeted”)



**Source:** CNFSIS - Raport public anual [Yearly public report] 2013.

Both the number of equivalent and unit equivalent students are dependent on the above mentioned coefficients that are established (politically) for each academic year by the Ministry of Education, which can thus adjust and control the resources allocated to higher education. Nevertheless, both the equivalence coefficient and the cost coefficient remained relatively stable in the past ten years. Table 1 shows the evolution of the cost coefficient in the past decade: except mathematics, psychology, medicine and film, all other fields of study were constant in their cost estimations.

Between 1999 and 2001, the allocation of funds to the different higher education institutions was dependent solely on a quantitative factor: the number of students universities managed to attract (determined indirectly also by the accreditation it received from ARACIS who establishes the maximum number of students a university can admit). The distribution of funds was in no way directly dependent on qualitative factors related to internal performance of higher education institutions. One of the main reasons for the introduction of these qualitative factors was to incentivize universities to implement internal quality assurance mechanisms and force them to direct their efforts not only to teaching but to research as well since this was perceived as the best way to improve the performance of academic staff and the curricula of study programs (CNFIS *Analiza*,

2008: 3-4). In 2002, four quality indicators were introduced for this purpose: QI.1 (Quality Indicator) the degree of academic positions occupancy in order to stimulate universities to hire more staff and thus improve the quality of education – up to that time universities having similar number of equivalent students would receive the same type of funding even if one would have significant less number of academic personnel employed (CNFIS *Propuneri*, 2002: 5-6); QI.2 the quota of full professors and associate-professors; QI.3 the quota of academic staff under 35 years; and QI.4 the number of academic staff holding a doctoral degree.

**Table 1.**

**The evolution of the cost coefficient between 2002 and 2010**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Technical	1.65	1.90			1.75						
Technical, without engineering physics and chemical engineering		1.65	1.65	1.65		1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75
Technical: engineering physics and chemical engineering						1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90
Architecture	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50
Agronomy	1.69	1.69	1.69	1.69	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75
Sciences	1.65	1.90			1.65						
Sciences, without physics and chemistry		1.65	1.65	1.65		1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65
Sciences: physics and chemistry						1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90
Physics and Chemistry		1.90	1.90	1.90							
Mathematics and Special mathematics	1.28	1.28	1.28	1.28	1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65
Social sciences and Humanities	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Psychology	1.28	1.28	1.28	1.28	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Medicine	1.90	1.90	1.90	1.90	2.00	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25
Economics	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Theatre	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37
Film	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.50
Musical performance		5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37
Music	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Arts		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Sport	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.86

**Source:** CNFSIS - Raport public anual [Yearly public report] 2012.

In 2003 these quality indicators were diversified to a number of 13 and they additionally included: QI.5 - the quota of post-graduate students; QI.6 - the percentage of core funding allocated to libraries and laboratories; QI.7 - the quality of academic and administrative management; QI.8 scientific research performed by academic staff; QI.9 - spending on material resources required for teaching activities; QI.10 - the quality of social and administrative services offered to students; QI.11 - quota of incomes generated autonomously by the university; QI.12 - quota of research grants and contracts; and QI.13 - quota of funds allocated to institutional development from own incomes (*CNFIS Propuneri*, 2003: 5-13). All these indicators were grouped in three categories: QI.1-QI.6 - indicators related to the quality of didactic process having a weight of 50% in the total of quality indicators; QI.7-QI.10 - indicators related directly to the quality of teaching having a weight of 30%; and QI.11-QI.13 - indicators related to institutional performance with a weight of 20%. The implementation of these quality evaluations was accompanied by the differentiation of the funding allocated to higher education into two sections: *core funding* and *funding based on quality indicators*. For 2003 the latter would represent 12.7% of the total funding while 82.3% would be allocated based on quantitative criteria (number of equivalent students). A special attention was given to I.Q. 8, the scientific research performed by academic staff, which would represent 3% of the total funding. Through this manner, for the first time, the funding of higher education institutions was distributed not only based on quantitative criteria (number and type of students) but based on qualitative ones as well. 12.7 % of total funding represents an important amount of money and this meant that universities were under external pressure to improve their performance and implement internal quality assurances mechanisms in order to attract more resources.

In the coming decade these quality indicators would undergo a process of diversification and standardization. Their internal weight would be adjusted and readjusted in order to generate a mechanism of funding distribution that had the potential to enable universities to invest in their institutional development and allocate internal resources towards improving their performance in accordance with the different quality dimensions. In order to make this possible, a predictable environment was needed, in which the governance of higher education would be transparent enough such as to produce long-term investments in human resources and academic services. This was not always the case. In the winter of 2004, a shift in power took place and the socialist government was replaced by a liberal one. In the spring of 2006, the methodology for distributing funds to higher education

institutions<sup>9</sup> would change once more and the funding based on quality indicators would be raised from 12.7% to 20%. This triggered an increase in the focus towards quality indicators and making universities responsible for their revenues and financial well-being. The implementation of internal reforms started becoming serious business: 1/5 of the total public funding would depend on how fast these quality adjustments were implemented, since higher scores achieved by other (competing) universities meant losing money in favour of them. In 2007<sup>10</sup>, the funding based on qualitative indicators was raised to 25% of the total funding and, for the first time since 2003, the QI.8 (now renamed QI.6), the scientific research done by academic staff would have a more significant role and would represent 5% of total funding. In 2008<sup>11</sup>, a new threshold would be reached: Q.I. based finance would be expanded to 30% and IQ.6 (scientific research) to 7% of the total funding. This mechanism of distribution of funds would remain the same for 2009<sup>12</sup>, 2010<sup>13</sup> and 2011<sup>14</sup>. The following chart represents the evolution of the funding based on quality indicators and the percentage of total funding based on the research performed by academic staff.

For a long period of time, the students who were self-financing their studies were an important source of revenue for universities. In the context of low financing allocated by the state for higher education grants, both private and public universities seized on the opportunity to attract an increasing share of high-school students that wanted to have an BA, MA or PhD degree, but could not occupy (through competition) the state-financed positions. Because of a series of factors (demographic decline, higher standards for high school graduation), universities eventually started losing the financial resources coming from fee-paying students: from 2007, the percentage of self-financing students dropped from 54.89% to 39.58% in 2013. This meant that resources allocated on qualitative indicators would have a higher and higher stake for the university's budget and that the improvement of its global institutional performance, the activity of member faculties, the marketization of its study programs, the scientific research of its staff, etc. would play a critical role for the financial stability of the institution.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://vechi.cnfis.ro/fb2006/fb2006.html> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

<sup>10</sup> <http://vechi.cnfis.ro/fb2007/fb2007.html> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

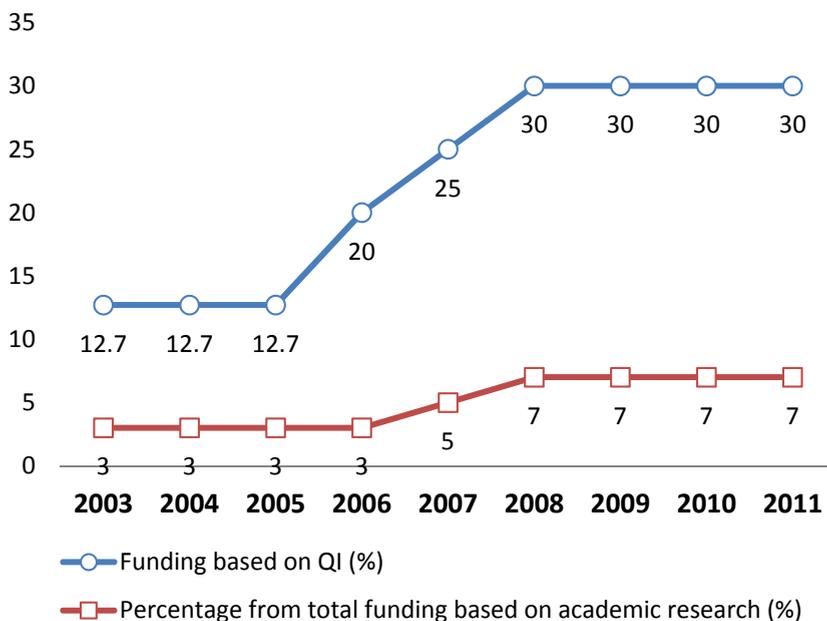
<sup>11</sup> <http://vechi.cnfis.ro/fb2008/fb2008.html> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

<sup>12</sup> <http://vechi.cnfis.ro/fb2009/fb2009.html> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

<sup>13</sup> <http://vechi.cnfis.ro/fb2010/fb2010.html> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

<sup>14</sup> <http://vechi.cnfis.ro/fb2011/fb2011.html> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

**Figure 2. Evolution of funding based on quality indicators and of the percentage from total funding based on academic research**



**Source:** Own computation based on annual methodology proposed by CNFSIS, corroborated with Radu Mircea Damian's presentation, the former president of CNFSIS <http://www.mf.gov.md/common/news/112408-prezentare.ppt> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

**Table 2.**  
**Budgeted and self-financed students in public universities**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Percentage of self-financing students	54.89	55.54	54.44	54.22	49.92	44.5	39.58
Percentage of budgeted students	45.11	44.46	45.56	45.78	50.08	55.5	60.42

**Source:** CNFSIS - Raport public annual [Yearly public report] 2013.

A further dramatic change in higher education governance occurred in 2012, when a completely new mechanism of funding higher education institutions was implemented. This involved both a process of classification and hierarchization of universities and the distribution of resources based on the ranking of each single program of study. The percentage of quality indicators funds would remain the same (30%) but the weight of scientific research performed by academic staff would play a tremendous role. If in 2003 3% of the total funding allocated based on scientific research represented 23.62% of the total funding based on qualitative indicators, in 2012 the classification and hierarchization of study programs and universities would rely on an algorithm in which scientific research would weigh between 40% (for fields such as theology, history, philosophy, etc.) and 60% (for fields such as computer science, physics, engineering, etc.)<sup>15</sup>! Given that in 2012 supplementary funding represented 30% (25% supplementary funding based on excellence) of total funding, a mechanism of ranking higher education institutions that took into account up to 60% the scientific research done by its employees meant that the budget of a university suddenly became greatly dependant on the research productivity of its academics. Between 2006 and 2012 the funding based on quality indicators increased dramatically and so did the weight in the total funding of research done by academics. In less than 10 years the governance of the Romanian academic space underwent striking changes: in 2002 the four quality indicators did not even mention scientific research; a decade later this would be the main factor used to differentiate between fund quantities received by universities.

### **Neo-liberal reforms in the Romanian higher education system**

Something unusual and noteworthy must have happened within the system in order for it to register scientific research of academics as one of the most important variables for allocating funds to higher education institutions. Such a disruption of existing institutionalized financial mechanisms and the embedding of a new logic of funding in which the productivity of workers is iterated as one of the main factors for differentiating among beneficiaries of public resources in order to carry out a public service, cannot be left unexplored. In what follows I would like to reconstruct the genealogy of this transformation, analyze the narratives that were mobilized for reforming higher education and show how internal quality enhancement policies (a legitimate objective for all stakeholders) have been codified as a neo-liberal instrument meant to discipline workers and make them compete against each other for the ever-decreasing resources allocated to education. The supplementary funding for excellence

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<sup>15</sup> See CNFIS Metodologie 2012 and OMECTS 5212/26.08.2011.

was never what it claimed to be – it was only the objectivation of a deep-seated view of a certain segment of the post-communist liberal intelligentsia that believed that the dysfunctions of the educational system could be dealt through a shock therapy and a ‘civilizing’ ideology that identified the predominance of ‘lazy’, ‘mediocre’ and ‘parochial’ academic workers as the main reason for the provincial backwardness of Romanian education.

The Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Elaboration of Education and Research Policies (PCAEERP) was set up in 2006 by then Romanian President Traian Basescu - who emerged as the leader of a right-wing liberal-democrat coalition during the early 2000’s. The Presidential committee was chaired by Mircea Miclea, a Psychology Professor from Babeş-Bolyai University, who for a short period of time, (December 2004 – November 2005) was the Minister of Education in the liberal government led by Calin Popescu Tariceanu (the president of the National Liberal Party). The Committee had two vice-presidents: Daniel David (also from Babeş-Bolyai University), a psychologist and a long collaborator of Mircea Miclea, who by that time established a name for himself as an international recognized researcher and Daniel Funeriu, a chemist who held important research positions in Germany, Japan and U.S. Later on, Daniel Funeriu would become the Minister of Education and would play an important role in implementing the recommendation drafted by the Presidential Commission in the Romanian educational system.

The Presidential Report entitled *A Romania of Teaching, a Romania of Research (Raportul Comisiei Prezidențiale - RCP, 2007)* was one of the most evidently neo-liberal manifestos ever drafted in the national academia and it advocated new educational policies and comprehensive structural reforms. One of the acknowledged sources of inspirations of the Report was the U.S. educational system: the authors referred to the *Tough Choices* or *Though Time Report* that advocated, under the Bush jr. presidency<sup>16</sup>, strong neo-liberal reforms centred on employability, flexible workforce, long-life learning etc. The idea of the backwardness of the Romanian education system in comparison with the Western system informed the entire analysis and the selected examples focused usually on the most extreme market-oriented education policies existing in the Western countries, in order to emphasize the tremendous gap and the radical and drastic reforms needed to “Europeanize” national academia. The Presidential Report was the first document that coherently articulated an extensive and thorough reconstruction of the education system in the Romanian academic space and its adjustment to global markets and academic competitiveness. Because both the actors and the policies drafted by them in this document played an important role in the institutionalization of a new governance in the higher

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<sup>16</sup> The presidency of George W. Bush, 1993-2009.

education sector from Romania, it is important to briefly analyze the language and arguments the Report mobilized in order to narrate and illustrate the required reforms.

The Presidential Report proceeded from an open political statement:

We consider that present-day Romania is a country confronted with major risks because the education and research systems do not fulfil the minimal requirements of a European society and economy in which *knowledge is the most valuable commodity* and the most important source for social-economic and personal development [emphasis added] (RCP, 2007:5).

It then made a short and punctual analysis that aimed at shattering the provincial illusion that Romania had an outstanding educational system given the achievement of Romanian pupils in international competitions. The analysis (as presented in the Presidential Report) was a superficial one and made use of statistical data that had little relevance for the argument it wanted to make: for example the “non-relevance in relation with the economy and society of future” (RCP, 2007: 7) has little to do with the Lisbon indicators, this rather shows the lack of resources allocated to the educational sector and hints to the socio-structural factors that generate such outcomes below the European average. Nevertheless, the Report hinted to the big inequalities existing in terms of access to education between the urban and rural areas and pointed to the general exclusion of ethnic minorities, such as Roma. It also raised awareness to the lack of adequate infrastructure (building renovation, access to internet etc.), but it has done so in a language that pointed to the ageing human resources and its lack of performance. It called for professional managers and warned that “the inertia of the system is tremendous” (RCP, 2007: 9).

The analysis of the Commission heavily relied on the idea that higher education institutions had developed into uniform enterprises: in terms of their mission, education programs and human resources. The main issue emphasized by the Commission was that these universities attracted the same type of financial resources from the government regardless of their performance and, because of that, it advocated the implementation of various mechanisms of differentiation. The lack of academic excellence was considered a direct outcome of this uniformity. The proposed model was inspired by U.S. academia where through “natural evolution [*sic!*]” (RCP, 2007: 23) only 3 % of the universities are considered “research-intensive” and only 13 % offer PhD degrees. A similar case is that of Canada, where only 5 universities out of 109 are responsible for almost 50% of the PhD degrees (RCP, 2007: 23). Because universities oppose these structural changes, the policies that allocate financial resources in accordance with performance and resist the concentration of resources in the hands of elite universities, the competitiveness of the educational system had to be achieved

“from top to bottom through a decision by the Government” (RCP, 2007: 23). This breaching of democratic processes and consultation with stakeholders is not accidental. An important reason for the lack of performance and “uniformity”, according to the authors of the Presidential Report was the collegial system of governance existing in the Romanian universities. This democratic mode of governance was considered as the “first responsible for the weak performances obtained by the universities in their core activities: research, innovation, education” (RCP, 2007: 25). Instead of this, the commission advocated for a new management system that was similar to the corporate world in which managers would lead both universities and faculties: “there is a clear international tendency to replace the collegial system with a managerial that is similar to the corporatist one” (RCP, 2007: 25). Instead of democratic elections, these new managers had to be appointed with specific tasks of running the higher institutions in accordance with corporate and competitive standards.

The general language of the Presidential Report was a self-Orientalizing one that induced a culpabilization of teachers and professors for the lack of performance in the educational system. It was their corruption, mediocrity and provincialism that explained an important part of the existing failure. For example, the lack of success in attracting EU funds in education is related “solely to the incompetency” (RCP, 2007:26) of universities – and disregards the fact that these are rather systemic dysfunctionalities that are encountered in all areas (not only in education) and are characteristic to all EU peripheries. In 2010, when the President had to defend the drastic budget cuts allocated to the educational system and the 25% salary reduction of all state employees (teachers and professors included), he was echoing the same type of narrative of a lazy and unproductive professor. Referring to the weekly teaching load (and purposely excluding the time needed for preparation of classes and evaluation of students) the President unashamedly said:

I would tell the teacher that he, nevertheless, works 16 hours a week, while I have to work 16 hours a day. If he calculates the hourly payment, he might come to the conclusion that he is better paid than me by the hour. [...] It is true that I have a big salary after 30 years of work. We all had low wages in certain periods of our career. [...] On the other hand, we all have the possibility to look for a job, a half time norm. This is life in capitalism and we have to get accustomed with the idea that the first responsible for our lives are ourselves, not the state (President Traian Băsescu interviewed at Radio Romania Actualitati, Bucharest, 11.08.2010,  
<http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/basescu-un-profesor-care-are-16-ore-pe-saptamana-este-mai-bine-platit-ca-mine-pe-ora-6849749> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

The Report advocated a more entrepreneurial educational system (RCP, 2007:27-28) and it recommended the implementation of policies that could stimulate competitiveness among universities. For example it asked for a much more flexible way of allocating money for study programs and not per student: this way each university could opt between “either covering the entire costs of a small number of students, or covering partial costs of a large number of students” (RCP, 2007: 26). It asked in various ways for privatizing parts of the higher education system in order to attract more private funding and connect the University to the business sector. But more than this, and important for the argument of this paper, it asked for the classification and hierarchization of all universities and the allocation of resources to higher education institutions based on performance. This model could ensure a “competitive university system” (RCP, 2007: 23) and instil in its employees a more pro-active and competing environment. The differentiation of higher education institutions and the concentration of resources (in the hand of few elite universities) were presented as a stringent solution for de-provincialization and international competitiveness and the main ingredients for the development of the educational system. Given the fact that the report already established that the higher education system from Romania is characterized by “few islands of excellence immersed in a sea of mediocrity” (RCP, 2007:9) these policies aimed clearly at re-allocation of funds to those universities that could be more competitive and at the deployment of disciplinary procedures against those universities that were not. The idea behind this was to re-engineer the way education was financed in order make the higher education institutions *compete* more against each other for resources and enhance the quality of education through market-style mechanisms. These market-devices had to be eventually implemented in the whole Romanian educational system. Speaking of the autonomy of schools and teachers and the need for flexible curricula that has to be established by each singular unit, the Report noted:

This way, the foundations for educational competition are laid and for the positioning of each school on the market of educational services. A competitive offer will satisfy a bigger demand, will attract more pupils and so, more resources – the public money following the options the pupils make. On the contrary, a non-competitive offer will lead to a marginalization of a school leading to its abolition and to the taking over of its infrastructure by a more competitive school and relevant for the needs of recipients (RCP, 2007: 16).

The emulation of market driven competition could not be more clearly expressed, the difference being that this competition would not be between private units on a free market, but between public institutions in a competitive

environment simulated by state. Neo-liberal reforms were this way clearly articulated for the first time in the Romanian educational system.

The Presidential Report could have stayed a simple expertise document with a high symbolic value endorsed by Presidency. Given the rift between himself and the Prime-minister who decided in the Spring of 2007 to break the existing coalition and expel from the Government members of the Democratic-Liberal Party that was led by the President before assuming office – there were reasonable expectations that the Presidential Report would have a limited impact on the existing education system. But it did not. In March 2008 the President managed to pursue all parliamentary parties to endorse a National Pact for Education that was summarizing in 8 points almost all recommendations issued in the Presidential Report<sup>17</sup>. Some of these objectives were referring to immediate reforms that had to be implemented between 2008-2013, others were intended for a longer time period. All of the objectives referred to the above mentioned reforms of the educational system and emphasized once again international performance, competitiveness, coherence of educational policies, new rules of financing, decentralization etc. But it also stated clearly that the budget for education will be increased to 6% of GDP and an additional 1% of GDP would be allocated to research. This actually never happened, but what happened was that most of these neo-liberal reforms were gradually implemented in the Romanian educational system. The National Pact for Education was signed by representatives of all parliamentary parties and by the President and it became the framework of most of the educational reforms that were to be implemented in coming years. Later on, the National Pact of Education was also signed by the Romanian Academy, unions, student associations and other non-governmental stakeholders – a general consensus emerged, stating that reforms and supplementary budget allocations would be needed in order to bring education to European standards<sup>18</sup>. The political Pact agreed that within 18 months after the signing of the document a comprehensive strategy of reforms in education would be elaborated.

The promised strategy was drafted by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Elaboration of Education and Research Policies in within a few months after the National Pact for Education was signed. On 24 of October 2008 the strategy, entitled *Education and Research for the Knowledge Society – Strategy* (ERKSS), was endorsed by all major trade unions and federations in education<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/Pactul\\_National\\_pentru\\_Educatie.pdf](http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/Pactul_National_pentru_Educatie.pdf) [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/COMISIA\\_EDUCATIE/EDUCATION\\_AND\\_RESEARCH\\_FOR\\_A\\_KNOWLEDGE\\_SOCIETY.pdf](http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/COMISIA_EDUCATIE/EDUCATION_AND_RESEARCH_FOR_A_KNOWLEDGE_SOCIETY.pdf) [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

<sup>19</sup> [http://edu.presidency.ro/upload/Fundamentarea\\_demersului\\_legislativ.doc](http://edu.presidency.ro/upload/Fundamentarea_demersului_legislativ.doc) [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

The strategy was clarifying the specific ways in which the 8 objectives outlined in the National Pact for Education were meant to be implemented. The language and the policies were the same as in the Presidential Report but it additionally presented the ways, means, objectives and calendar of the intended reforms. The neo-liberal framework still informed all the policies, but this time it hinted to the deeper mentality structures that had to be reformed as well, in order for these changes to be effective:

All the measures and actions proposed within this strategy aim not only at a new institutional and legislative commitment, but especially *at a new axiological commitment, a new hierarchy of values* that should make us overcome the axiological disorientation which we have experienced after 1989 [emphasis added] (ERKSS, 2008:4).

In my opinion these deep axiological structural changes that had to be embedded in the Romanian educational system for the first time after the break of the communism in order for it to be competitive on a global European scale can be summarized in two sentences that occur in the strategy:

Decentralisation is not a purpose in itself; it makes sense if it renders the system more efficient, more relevant, more equitable and qualitatively better. *The state will foster competition within the educational system, by all means possible* [emphasis added] (ERKSS, 2008:17).

The implementation of competitiveness and differentiation in terms of financing among individual educational institutions based on this competition was the main code-language of the new architecture of the system that runs from primary schools to post-graduate research institutions. The achievement of this strategy required the various responsible governing bodies to implement quality assurance benchmarks, institutional evaluations, assessment of didactic personnel, differentiation of wages based on performance, offer and demand tools that could instantiate market driven mechanisms to punish those institutions that were not competitive enough and enable the concentration of resources in the hands of those institutions that were capable of supplying qualitative educational services: “competition will bring about differentiation and hierarchies, will show where quality is and allow us to know whom to reward and whom to penalise” (ERKSS, 2008: 20). These reforms required the design of new evaluative meta-institutions, curricula assessments and diploma certifications, new modes of teaching and learning based on the transmission of specific competences, new ways of institutional accounting, new ways of allocating financial resources. It also required a de-politization of the institution of the school directors (principles)

and its transformation into bureaucratic managers and technocrats that could implement these market driven mechanisms in the entire educational body. Generally speaking, the *Education and Research for the Knowledge Society Strategy* outlined the classic neo-liberal tools for incentivizing performance and the compelling of the system through standard governmentalization devices to produce a higher quality of educational services. I would like to dwell only on two of the objectives the strategy referred to and relate this to the higher education reforms I focus on in this paper: the second objective, of “placing at least 3 Romanian universities in the first 500 universities in the world” and the third one, on “increasing the scientific production up to 5 times and tripling the global innovation indicator, allowing us to reach the actual EU average for these indicators” (ERKSS, 2008: 4).

In order to achieve the above objectives, the strategy asked for new type of differentiation of higher educational institutions that had to take place on all existing levels: universities, faculties, departments and programs of study. The strategy asked for a way of evaluating higher institutions that could capture different types of classifications of both universities among themselves or programs of study (ex. departments that offer sociology as a degree) among themselves. This way an evaluative grid could be produced that would individualize universities as managing structures that could exert local pressure on faculties to fulfil certain quality benchmarks on one hand, and would mobilize academics within similar departments to relate their teaching and research to peers and compete against them in order to attract funding on the other. For this several measurements were proposed (ERKSS, 2008:28-32):

First, a nationwide evaluation of all higher education institutions and the creating, based on the assessment of their performance, of four hierarchical categories (in reverse order): vocational institutions, educational institutions (that would offer only undergraduate degrees), educational and research institutions (that would offer in addition master degrees) and research-intensive institutions (that would have the right to organize doctoral programs as well). Given the fact that the financing of the education was still going to be according to number of students and that this was weighted in accordance with level of education – this meant that those higher institutions that could organize PhD programs could attract as well more financing. This regulation was meant not only as a way of classifying universities, but also as a way of restricting those institutions that were not competitive enough to access funding.

Second, the strategy asked for a hierarchization of study programs. This meant that all curricula programs leading to a degree could be standardized and evaluated through a procedure that enabled their ranking. The reason for this was to instil in the system a selection mechanism:

Top-level study programmes will receive priority funding by study grants. Low quality programmes from public universities will no longer receive public funding for student tuition (ERKSS, 2008: 30).

Third, an evaluation of all departments and their classification based on a five level performance scale. This measurement aimed at contractually binding rectors (managers) to distribute local funding to those departments that are competitive. If the second strategy aimed a vertical evaluation of study programs across universities, this strategy was implementing a horizontal evaluation of each single department in relation to other departments from the same university. We have to bear in mind that while the second strategy was leaving room for the professors teaching in that evaluated study program to create new programs of education in case the existing one got cancelled, the third strategy was a direct threat to those departments that would not fulfil the required standards and implicitly to their jobs:

Less competitive departments/chairs will be submitted to rigorous monitoring for 2 years, and will be liable to be dismantled if they do not significantly improve their performances (ERKSS, 2008: 30).

Forth, a new way of financing higher education institutions was established in order to make them more accountable. The strategy was advocating a differential mode of allocating financial resources and set up, consequently, three different categories of funding: basic funding (standard cost of the education of students), complementary funding (for material investments) and supplementary funding (for excellence in teaching and research). The last type of funding would play later on an important role in distributing and concentrating the financial resources in the hands of a few universities. The principle behind the differentiation among types of funding was not new, under different names these already existed in the Romanian education system (funding based on quality indicators). The novelty consisted in their formalization and the new competitive environment that was designed through the new governance policies.

Surprisingly, the *Strategy* encountered little opposition and was almost unchallenged in the public sphere and academia. The euphoria of the recent EU integration (2007) conveyed further legitimacy to the idea that the national education system had to be brought to the European standards through sustained efforts. The following years were also a turbulent period for the Romanian political system: the 2008 Parliamentary elections brought a new party alliance to power but, because of opposing political views (liberal-democrat versus social-democrat), this produced in this election cycle four different governments. Nevertheless, the first three governments (December 2008 - April 2012) were formed by members of the former political party to which the president belonged as well. This is why the government program for 2009-2012 was explicitly referring to

the adoption of the *Education and Research for the Knowledge Society Strategy* and the implementation of the *National Pact for Education*<sup>20</sup>. As of December 2009, Daniel Funeriu, one of the vice-president of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Elaboration of Education and Research Policies, became the Minister of Education in the Emil Boc Government. The neo-liberal policies drafted in the *Presidential Report* and the *National Strategy* became government policies soon after.

We should pause for a moment and briefly contextualize the translation of these recommendations and strategies into state policies and actual reforms. In 2008, the financial crisis started to impact Eastern Europe, Romania included. Romania was hit severely by the crisis due to its dependent capitalist economy (Ban, 2014) and its reliance on foreign investments and exports. By 2008, as much as 85% of the national banking assets belonged to foreign investors and 80% of the credits were issued in the Euro currency (Ban, 2014: 227). This meant that the global financial crisis affected Romania directly and produced a decreasing exposure of the international banks and trans-national capital to Eastern Europe. Foreign investment diminished dramatically and what was the catalyst of economic growth during 2000's became soon the cause of a structural crisis (Ban, 2014: 230). In order to avoid default and restore confidence in the banking system the Romanian government agreed in March 2009 to sign a stand-by agreement with IMF and the European Commission. In exchange of external financial support the government pledged to cut public spending, reduce the fiscal deficit and implement austerity measures. This ranged from reduction of staff personal in the state sector, budgetary discipline, new fiscal policy regulations, uniformization and standardization of wages and pensions, the impossibility of promotion and new hiring in the public sector, the increase of VAT from 17% to 24%. Also, as of 2010 all state employees had their wages reduced by 25%, teachers and professors included. What is even more important for our analysis, the percentage of GDP allocated to education and research has significantly diminished.

In spite of all these, the government proceeded with the implementation of the above mentioned reforms and changed the National Educational Law which became effective as of 9 February 2011. The new law implemented most of the above mentioned reforms and produced a new mode of governance of the national educational system. As one regional commentator noted referring to the new classification and ranking system of higher education institutions and the allocation of funds in accordance with their performance:

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<sup>20</sup> Program de Guvernare 2009 – 2012, 2008:20, Retrieved from:  
<http://www.cdep.ro/pdfs/guv200912/ProgramGuvernare.pdf> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

Romania became one of the few Eastern European countries to introduce a diversification policy based on the classification of universities and ranking of study programmes [...]. In this respect, Romania has been a very unique case, since it was the first 'attempt' in Europe to actually use a classifications and ranking exercise for such broad purposes (Sabic, 2014: 2).

In the midst of the financial crisis, budget austerity and drastic reduction of wages in the education system, the government was pioneering structural neo-liberal reforms and making efforts to implement a competitive environment and market-oriented reforms. What initially seemed a "balanced" agreement between a government oriented to market reforms on one side and labour (represented by trade unions) on the other, that implicitly stipulated that in exchange of structural reforms a bigger share of GDP (6%+1%) would be allocated for education and research, was now being implemented with even scarcer resources and a stronger will to discipline state employees into becoming productive agents of national prosperity.

### **Naturalizing the neo-liberal reform: supplementary funding and academic competitiveness**

In this section I will analyze the direct consequences of these neo-liberal reforms and the impact the new Education Law had on the distribution of funds to higher education institutions. In 2011, a massive process of evaluation of universities, based on a very complex and diversified methodology that was collecting unprecedented data about their academic and institutional performance commenced<sup>21</sup>. The purpose of this was the classification and hierarchization of universities and the allocation of funding based on their individual performance. The methodology worked with four classes of indicators: scientific research, teaching-learning, relationship with external environment and institutional capability. The weight of these indicators was different for each domain of studies, but in each single case, scientific research was the most important one and it ranged from 40% to 60%. The majority of study programs had the maximum weight of 60% for the scientific research criteria from the total of quality indicators, while around 27 % had the minimum weight (40%)<sup>22</sup>. Even so, this percentage was much higher than in the previous years when scientific research had not exceeded 24% of the total of quality indicators. Between 2011 and 2012, the direct performance of academic staff in terms of research became the main factor for the evaluation of the internal quality of a university.

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<sup>21</sup> OMECTS 4072/21.04.2011 and OMETCS 4174/2011.

<sup>22</sup> OMECTS 5212/26.08.2011.

Depending on the score it received based on these four classes of quality indicators, all national study programs were classified in five hierarchical categories (from A to E). For example, from the total of 23 political science study domains existing within all Romanian universities, only 21% (5) received an A ranking (the highest)<sup>23</sup>. Based on the performance of its study programs and other institutional criteria, all higher institutions were classified in four categories: universities of advanced research and teaching (Class I), universities of education and scientific research (Class II), universities of education and artistic creation (Class II), and universities centred on education (Class III)<sup>24</sup>. The idea of an elite university was finally materialized, together with an array of procedures, rules and laws that enabled such differentiations.

**Table 3.**

**Classification of Romanian Universities**

Percentage of Universities	Class I	Class II	Class III
	13.33 %	33.33%	53.33 %

**Source:** Own computation based on the classification of universities after H.G. 789/2011.

The classification of universities had a direct effect on how student grants (budgeted study places) would be allocated, thus impacting the core funding they received based on the number of equivalent unit students. The classification of study programs directly influenced the way supplementary funding (*finanțarea suplimentară*) was distributed to universities. In 2012, a major change occurred in the logic of distribution of supplementary funding. While in previous years, the performance of higher education institutions was aggregated at university level, meaning that the university as a unit was reporting its outputs as a whole and that the university as unit received a share of the funding from the Ministry of Education based on qualitative indicators that was then re-distributed internally by the institution, in 2012 the algorithm<sup>25</sup> of distribution relied on the segmentation of the total supplementary funding for each individual domain of study and then, according to the yielded ranking of each domain of study from each university (from A to E), a share of money was distributed to each institution. This meant that the supplementary funding was registered as an outcome of a much smaller unit (domain of study) which usually, but not always, corresponds to that of the department. This is why the ranking of each domain of study in relation with

<sup>23</sup> The Methodology for the Ranking of University Programs was approved by H.G. 789/2011, and it followed the general regulations set by Art.193 of the Law on Education 1/2011.

<http://uefiscdi.gov.ro/articole/2535/clasificare-universitati-si-ierarhizare-programe-de-studii.html>  
[Last accessed: 03.05.2015].

<sup>24</sup> OMETCS 5262/5.092011.

<sup>25</sup> CNFIS Metodologie 2012.

similar domains of study from throughout the country became a game with high stakes: the competition was not between universities anymore, the governance mechanism became finer and more precise and it identified a more exact level of intervention. Academic competition ceased to be an abstract function of big institutional structures (universities) - it was now lowered at the level of faculties (and departments) whose performances could now be measured against similar faculties and whose academic outputs determined the share of funding they would receive.

In order to distribute the supplementary funding based on above mentioned criteria, an excellence index was proposed. It was computed for each of the five possible ranks of study domains (CNFIS *Metodologie*, 2012: 25). The beneficiaries of the supplementary funding would generally be those universities that had study domains ranked A or B, thus receiving MA and PhD budgeted places (based on a political decision).

**Table 4.**

**Excellence index of university ranks**

	E	D	B	C	A
BA Level	0	0	1	2	3
MA Level	0	0	0	1	4
PhD Level	0	0	0	1	5

**Source:** CNFISIS - Raport public anual [Yearly public report] 2012.

The impact of this new governance in higher education was enormous. The following table shows how these quality indexes impacted the allocation of funds towards the various types of study programs or study domains. The negative values express how much a study program actually lost compared to the situation in which supplementary funding would have been evenly distributed for unit equivalent student and not based on quality indexes. The positive values express how much it would actually gain due to this system of distribution of funds.

**Table 5.**

**Impact of excellence index**

	E	D	C	B	A
BA Level	- 27%	- 27%	- 15%	- 3%	9%
MA Level	- 27%	- 27%	- 27%	- 17%	13%
PhD Level	- 27%	- 27%	- 27%	- 20%	8%

**Source:** CNFISIS - Raport public anual [Yearly public report]2012.

Universities continue to be the legal beneficiaries of funding, even if performance was computed based on indicators at the level of faculties and domain of studies. This means that the universities that had mainly B, C, D and E programs received significantly less money than it received based on the quality indicators valid during last year. The impact was so strong that a lot of universities were on the verge of bankruptcy (CNFSIS – *Raport*, 2012) and one higher institution (Northern University from Baia Mare) had to be shut down and merged with a more successful one (Technical University from Cluj-Napoca). But some universities benefited greatly from this new mechanism. For example, Polytechnic University Bucharest received 13.2% more money compared to the hypothetical situation that the 30% allocated through Supplementary funding (25% based on excellence) would have been distributed evenly among unitary equivalent students. In 2011 the same university gained an increase of only 6.7% due to the impact of quality indicators. Similarly, at the opposite end, “Lucian Blaga” University from Sibiu for example lost due to the new quality index 13.5 % of total funding compared to a loss of only 5.5% the previous year due to the quality indicators. Table 6 shows the central indicators and dispersion measures of gains and losses (expressed in percentages) of all Romanian universities due to the implementation of quality indicators in 2011 and 2012: one takes into account the entire supplementary funding (30%), the second only the segment based on excellence (25%).

**Table 6.**

**Universities' gains and losses following the application of differential governmental funding based on the excellence index in 2012**

	2011	2012 (30%)	2012 (25%)
Number of universities	49	49	49
Mean	- 1.61	- 2.83	- 4.45
Std. Deviation	4.73	7.76	8.77
Variance	22.40	60.27	76.89
Min	- 11.5%	- 21.10%	-22.10%
Max	7.70%	13.50%	11.10%

**Source:** Own computation based on the data provided by CNFSIS - Raport public anual [Yearly public report]2012 regarding the impact of quality indicators on each of the 49 Romanian public universities.

The new mechanism of distributing funds to universities implemented in 2012 generated the biggest ever dispersion between higher education institutions and this was due solely to the new classification and hierarchization process that codified as the most important factor of differentiation the research done by academics. The concentration of resources in the hands of elite universities based on the meritocratic criteria that was advocated since 2007 by the Presidential Committee became now reality. No wonder that university managers started to be seriously preoccupied with the scientific productivity of its employees and to implement various surveillance mechanisms, collegial assessments and punitive measures against those that did not contribute to enhancement of internal quality of education.

The “supplementary funding” became this way the expression and equivalent of the academic research produced within each single department. Funding based on qualitative indicators existed, as we have seen since 2002, but never before did it have such a dispersive impact on the distribution of funds and never before did research have such economic relevance for universities. Supplementary funding became a fetishized concept among many academics and the general impression was, and still, is that this type of funding was something a university would receive on top of the core funding and it would represent a bonus, an extra-budgetary addition to the standard resources it usually got from the government. Something like an financial reward for excellence and outstanding teaching and research that was to be added to the basic funding. This couldn't be further from truth. As I will try to show bellow, the resources allocated to higher education institutions actually decreased and overall all universities received less money compared to the previous years. But before elaborating on this, we should pause for a moment and reflect on what it actually means that supplementary funding is allocated based on the competition between similar types of domain studies.

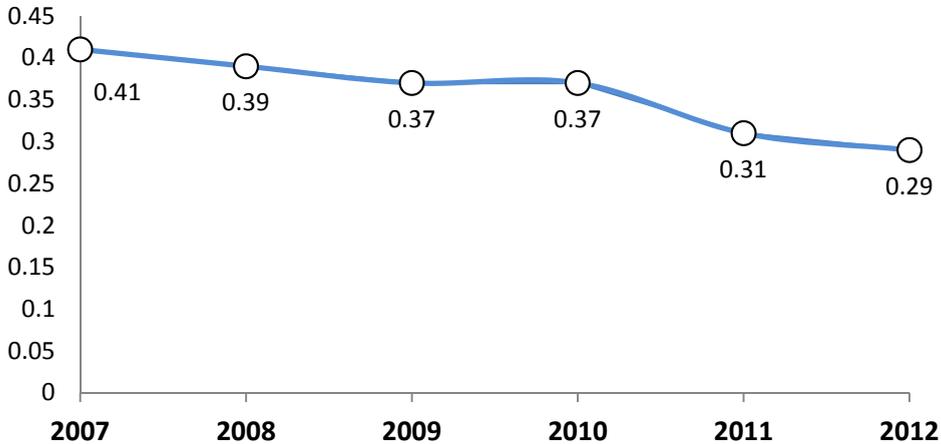
Let's imagine that in one hypothetical academic year all of the 23 political science departments mentioned above have an outstanding research activity. Each single member of each department publishes 10 ISI indexed scientific papers in the best available peer-reviewed journals, writes 10 exceptional books with the leading publishing houses, presents 10 working-papers at the main international conferences, delivers 10 key-note guest lectures and acts as the director of 10 important, well-funded research grants. And on top of this he/she is an outstanding teacher and an active member of the department in terms of administrative duties. In short, every single member of the 23 political science departments is an industrious unit of production. All of these in one academic year, working 40 hours/week, with the limited (and most of the time simply non-existing) resources offered by the university. Such an outstanding,

exceptional productivity will be for sure rewarded with a generous supplementary funding, a logic of abundance should follow for each of the 23 departments and shortage of resources will become a bygone era. But of course not! Because this is not the logic of the system; the system does not award productivity, does not give bonuses for excellent research. If everyone has *similar* research outputs their efforts cancel each other out and the resources are being divided equally among the 23 departments. The logic of a competitive academic environment has meaning and value only if it manages to differentiate departments and mobilize academics to work more in order to be a slightly more productive than the others. The way the system has been set up in the past years is not at all about stimulating research excellence; it is about competing against each other and trying to out-perform the other academics. At least in a private company operating in a free market-economy the capitalist entrepreneur can lure workers to enhance their productivity in exchange of small share of the additional profit it generates, but within a public sector what is the political value of such an neo-liberal ideology in an environment where there is a constant shortage and education is continuously sub-financed?

If one of the political science departments from the above mentioned example decides to opt out from this competitive game and leave the bonuses, supplementary resources and supplementary funding based on excellence to those departments that can miraculously wring water from flint (in no more than 8 hours a day, 40 hours / a week) it would soon find out, and many already did, that this would be the shortest way to bankruptcy. Not only Class III universities came short to the limit of default, but also many Faculties from Class I universities (institutions of advanced research and teaching) experienced serious financial troubles and registered a negative balance.

This happened because simultaneously with the neo-liberal governance of education and embedding of productivity enhancement mechanisms, the resources allocated to higher education institutions diminished. As we can see in the chart below the share of GDP allocated to higher education institutions since 2007, the year when these neo-liberal reforms have begun to shape the education system, has been dramatically reduced. This means that higher education institutions and academic spaces have been configured to function in an increasing competitive environment for lesser and lesser resources. This show that the enhancement of competitiveness in education was not about supplementing funds based on excellence in research but about a governmentality aimed at rationalizing costs, discipline the academic workforce and make it work in a more precarious environment.

**Figure 3. Percentage of GDP allocated to higher education institutions between 2007 and 2012 in Romania**

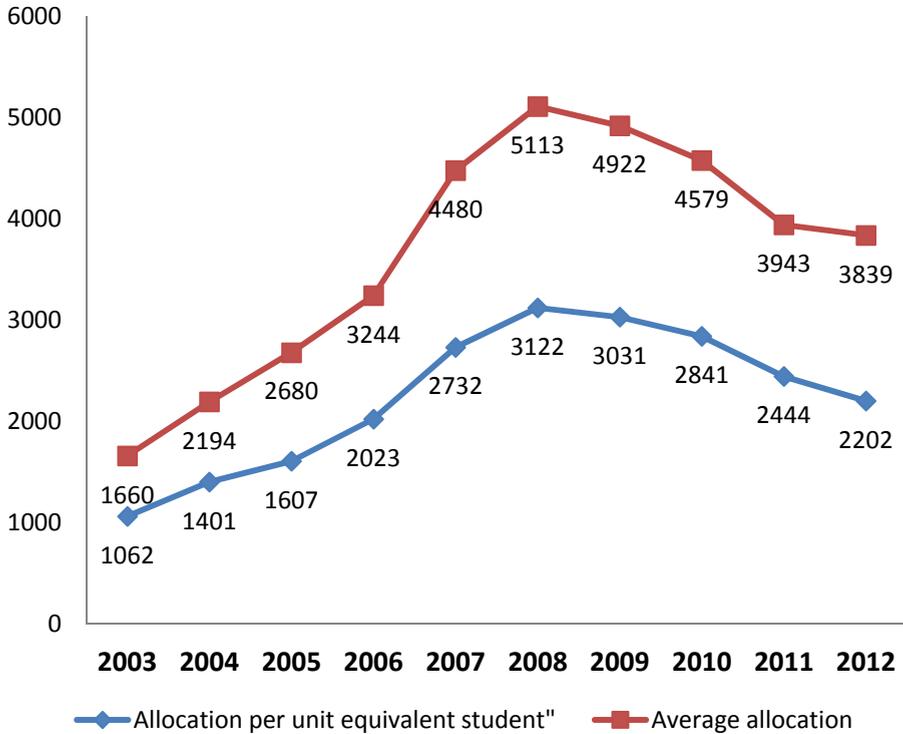


Source: CNFSIS - Raport public anual [Yearly public report] 2013.

A clearer expression of this can be obtained if we look at the evolution of the allocation per unit equivalent student (the mean sum a university receives for each unit equivalent student) or the average allocation (From 2003 there is a general increase of the both allocations until 2008 which is followed then (shortly after the beginnings of the neo-liberal reforms) by a constant drop. Nevertheless we should keep in mind that this is expressed in actual currency and is not adjusted with the growing inflation rate and diminishing purchase power. As the CNFIS, the governmental agency responsible with the financing of higher education institutions notes:

In fact, the sums of money allocated from 2003 until 2011 had approximately the same real value [...] If the core funding from the total sum has registered a modest increase in real terms in the 2003-2011 period, the allocation per unit equivalent student is in reality, when adjusted with the inflation rate, smaller in 2011 than in 2003. The difference is significant, almost 7% from the average allocation for equivalent student at the level of 2003 (CNFSIS - *Raport public anual*, 2012:17).

**Figure 4. The evolutions of allocation per unit equivalent student and average allocation in Romania between 2003-2012**



Source: CNFSIS - Raport public annual [Yearly public report] 2012.

The budget distributed to higher education institutions in terms of allocation per unit equivalent student was almost similar to the one in 2003 if we take into account the inflation rate. This means that the radical reforms that have begun in 2002/2003 when the productivity of academics was embed in the funding based on quality indicators was not accompanied by an increase of resources invested in universities as it was promised in 2012 when the National Pact for Education was signed. The percentage from GDP was far from 6%, in 2014 it barely reached 3.2 %<sup>26</sup> and this enables us to point out the asymmetry between neo-liberal policies aimed at enhancing productivity of work on the one side and chronic under-financing of education on the other side.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.zf.ro/eveniment/cu-2-5-din-pib-alocate-educatiei-romania-este-la-coada-clasamentului-lumii-in-privinta-finantarii-scolii-14119678> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

By the late 2012 a regime change occurred in Romania and a new socialist-liberal coalition came to power. The 2013 methodology for distributing funds to higher education was not changed in its essence, only the quality indexes were adjusted a bit<sup>27</sup> to enable C class program of studies to access more money and consequently the variance of governmental funding among universities decreased. Even if the total supplementary funding was reduced from 30.5% to 25.5% of the total funding, this did not affect the resources allocated to the supplementary funding for excellence, which remained fixed at 25%. In 2014 the socialist-liberal coalition broke and the liberals left the government: this had an immediate impact on the 2014-2015 methodology for distributing funds to higher education. In 2014, the hierarchization of universities was cancelled by a governmental decree<sup>28</sup>, but due to some internal struggles among universities the 2013 methodology was kept in place, only the quality indexes were adjusted in order to attenuate the dispersion of funding. The differentiation of universities based on categories ceased in 2015 and the system adopted the type of funding mechanism that was in place before 2012, based on 15 quality indicators. In 2015 the fraction of supplementary funding was set at 26.5% of the total funding, and 40% out of that represented quality indicators related to scientific research<sup>29</sup>. This means that 10.6% from the total funding distributed to universities was based on competition among academics in terms of research outputs. This “normalization” produced a ratio of research in the total funding higher than for the 2008-2011 period. Also the level of aggregation remained at the level of domain of studies which means that it reproduced the logic of competitiveness among academics working in the same field that was instituted in 2012. Both left and right wing political parties in Romania seem to agree that making the academic space more competitive is a straightforward way to advance reforms in higher education institutions in spite of the limited governmental resources available for education.

### **Conclusive thoughts: notes on the precarization of academic work**

Looking back at the last 10 years of transformations of the Romanian education system, we can notice a gradual embedding and naturalization of neo-liberal disciplinary reforms in higher education institutions. The extensive academic management based on scientometrics and recurrent evaluation of

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<sup>27</sup> CNFIS - Metodologie 2013.

<sup>28</sup> OUG 117/2013.

<sup>29</sup> CNFIS - Metodologie 2015.

academics that intensified in the past years is not an accident: it was part of an explicit neo-liberal agenda that started with the Presidential Report in 2007 and ended with the National Pact for Education, and so with a political agreement that materialized effectively with the new Education Law in 2011. The obsessive measuring of research outcomes, the inter-collegial evaluation of academic activity, the bureaucratization of academic spaces and the growth of administrative tasks are all direct effects of the institutionalization of neo-liberal technologies of work management. Higher education institutions are shaped in accordance with the logic of markets in which academic workers are re-imagined as competitors whom the state rewards and penalizes in accordance with offer-demand tools of assessment and cost-benefit schemes of evaluation. The neo-liberal transformations managed to instigate academic institutions against each other in order to make them more productive and so it enhanced the atomization of the whole educational system with serious consequences for the educational process.

The enhancement of teaching quality through research should be an important objective of all academics that care about higher education in Romania. My critique is not aimed at the use of quality indicators and the encouraging of research-oriented teaching. On the contrary, this should be an active demand for all working in higher education and preoccupied with the impact it has on students. Research-oriented teaching represents an important dimension of making curricula more relevant and connected to state of the art literature. Rather, I contest the means through which this is achieved, namely through a neo-liberal deployment of market-oriented policies. Let us sum up briefly the logic of these transformations: the allocation per equivalent student has been significantly downsized in the past years; the money transferred to universities is not sufficient for the actual costs involved by the education process; there is a growing tendency to allocate financial resources to universities based on quality indicators; the research done by academics is becoming the most important dimension of these quality indicators; the insufficient resources are distributed according to criteria that enhance competitiveness among academics; the productivity of higher education institutions is aggregated at lower and lower institutional levels in order to enable a more exact representation of this productivity and legitimize a "meritocratic" mechanism of distributing funds; for the government this is a zero-sum game since the budget allocated to higher education is similar (or smaller) even in the case when all institutions and academics are maybe ten times as productive as during the previous year. This means that in fact the whole strategy of the neo-liberal system is to stimulate productivity through the amplification of competition among academics and not through the allocation of sufficient resources (6% of GDP as it was promised in the *National Pact for Education*).

If the resources allocated for research by universities to academics (research grants, workshop grants, travel allowances to conferences, acquisitions of relevant books) are indeed almost completely lacking, then we need to ask ourselves how exactly is research produced by academics? Where do they find the financial resources and the time needed to achieve “excellence in research” and how do they manage to combine this with their actual teaching duties? An ethnography of the academic spaces existing in those universities that in 2012-2013 were classified as universities of advanced research and teaching (Babeş-Bolyai University being one of it) could provide an important insight into how precarious “excellence in research” could become. Based on the limited observations I made in the past years as a member of various academic networks, I would like to advance the hypothesis that the majority of academics that managed to be active producers of research are those that are able to obtain (through an open competition) national and international research grants. Since Romania has one of the lowest salaries for teachers and researchers in Europe, it is not uncommon that academics are members of various research projects in order to survive financially<sup>30</sup>. Most of the times these grants are in fact second-jobs that are performed on top of the 40 hours/week teaching and research activities. In the Romanian system a research grant does not lead to a lower teaching norm and this would not even be desired by academics since this would mean a diminished monthly salary. If this is the case, then research that is reported by academics for the institutional evaluation of their performance is the outcome of the additional, private time invested in education. This surplus time becomes the source of supplementary funding received by universities from the government. This has two important effects on the academia: first, the excellence in research is produced by the university through an appropriation of academics’ free time and their independent resources; second, since the system is set up to function as a competitive environment that allocates the supplementary funding to those departments that have managed to surpass similar departments from other universities, then this institutionalized accumulation of research through the appropriation of free time of academics has systemic effects on the entire academic system. If research is produced by extra-paid-work that academics perform on top of the 40 hours, then this is inscribed as the rule of competitive allocation of public resources: in order for an department to get the following year an even share from the supplementary funding, it has to be capable to produce similar research as its main competitors,

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<sup>30</sup> See *Teachers' and School Heads' Salaries and Allowances in Europe, 2013/14*.  
<http://www.eui.eu/ProgrammesAndFellowships/AcademicCareersObservatory/CareerComparisons/SalaryComparisons.aspx> [last accessed: 03.05.2015].

and consequently to rely on external research grants and the extra-work of its faculty. Working more than 40 hours and becoming more competitive than others for the same wage is gradually imposed as the norm. This means that in the absence of strong academic work regulation, the system has the potential of becoming a spiral that consumes more and more of academics' free time in order to adjudicate a fair share of the supplementary funding, without which basic activities are not sustainable. Failing to work above the average and to be more productive than the average (even if this means a lot more than 40 hours a week) leads to implicit punitive measures "legitimated" on grounds of losing vital funding. This is why the intensification of evaluation procedures and the implementation of various surveillance mechanisms have the potential to lead to dispossession of personal resources and precarization of academics.

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## THE MAKING OF CHEAP LABOUR POWER: NOKIA'S CASE IN CLUJ

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**Abstract.** This paper describes the procedures that minimized labour costs in a typical offshore factory of a large corporation from the global market: the Nokia factory in Cluj, Romania. Two interrelated factors contributed to this. Firstly, the arrival of neoliberal economic rationality created favourable conditions for transnational capital's free passage through the country. Secondly, under the imperative of flexibilization, the 2011 Labour Code modifications diminished employee rights and increased employers' privileges, allowing companies such as Nokia to freely assemble the region's labour force – engaging it in a complex production process – and disassemble it without any major consequences. Flexibilization permitted the use of outsourced labour power in the form of external employees, partly from rural areas, with short-term contracts and minimum wages.

**Keywords:** labour power, flexibilization, neoliberal rationality, global capital

### Introduction

Nokia is present in Romania with its Market Operations division that coordinates sales and marketing activities from Bucharest since 1997. In 2007, Nokia relocated its production facilities from Bochum, Germany to Jucu, Cluj County. Shortly after, the factory reached its peak production capacity employing approximately 4,000 workers. However, after only four years of activity, the factory closed. According to media information, roughly 2,200 employees were discharged in December 2011. Certainly, this type of processes are not new for the workings of global capital, and Central and Eastern European countries' peripheral position made them vulnerable to such developments. Relocating to different parts of the globe with little or no repercussions, in search for cheap, subordinated labour power represents a fundamental feature of transnational capital (Harvey, 1975, 2006; Henderson, 2004; Holloway, 2003). This was also

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the case with Nokia. The need for continuous accumulation determined the company to move its facilities to Asia where an even cheaper workforce was (and still is) available. Another case that illustrates these processes and also bears significant resemblance to Nokia's in Cluj is Flextronics' departure from Brno, the Czech Republic, in 2003, after approximately two years of stay (Drahokoupil, 2004).

I address the issue of capital relocation by revealing the specific ways in which a particular transnational company built, engaged and dismantled newly available labour power situated at the periphery of global capital's network. Romania's integration into the European Union, a process that started in 2000, was associated with inclusion into the global economy at its outskirts. As compared to other Romanian regions, Cluj County was a belated exception in this regard, mainly due to a conservative-nationalist administration that opposed transnational investments and generated thus a four-years delay in Cluj's "opening" towards global capital. This initial resistance intensified the "thirst for capital", therefore when the old administration finally succumbed to political pressures, it also further legitimized the newly assumed liberal ideology. As such, Nokia's workforce assembly was facilitated at the local level by the delegitimization of any opposition to global capital as narrow-mindedly conservative and nationalist. At the national level, the increasing economic liberalization materialized in the New Labour Code of 2011 (under the democratic-liberal government led by Emil Boc), which visibly favoured transnational capital.

In order to trace down how these processes played out at the level of the company, I made use of Burawoy's extended case method which was well suited for carrying out "workplace ethnography". This method requires the researcher to closely observe the activities on the shop floor, preferably from the posture of an employee actively participating in the production process. Practicing "workplace sociology", the researcher performs a focused research phase gaining a detailed overview of the site he studies (Burawoy, 2009). By laying emphasis on reflexivity, this method overcomes ethnography's shortcomings by concentrating on engagement. In opposition to positivist methodologies which seek to distance the researcher from his research subject, reflexive science "embraces not detachment but engagement as the road to knowledge" (Burawoy, 1998: 5). Objectivity is not achieved by determining universal laws applicable to every social reality. In this case, research is considered objective if it contributes to the growth of knowledge, conditioned by the fact that fieldwork is done with a theory in mind. Using the extended case method we "extract the general from the unique, move from the micro to the macro, connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory" (Burawoy, 2009: 21).

The empirical data presented here was collected using ethnographic methods: participant observation on the factory floor as an employee and in-depth interviews with former colleagues who held different ranks during the factory's functioning. Additionally, I used local and national online news providers such as *Gazeta de Cluj*, *Mediafax* and *Monitorul de Cluj* to supplement my data with public knowledge regarding this subject.

My entrance to the field coincided with applying for a job at the recently opened factory, which proudly advertised that "Nokia is always hiring". I reported to the indicated human resources office at the firm's headquarters. After a long wait, a short interview and one signature, I was hired and told to be present on the next morning at the bus stop that ensured commuting between the city of Cluj-Napoca and the location of the factory, the Tetarom III industrial park at the nearby village Jucu (see map on Figure 1). For approximately six months I was employed as an "operator" (routine manual worker) at the Nokia factory. Initially, I started working as an assembly operator, piecing together mobile phone parts on the assembly lines, the main and largest department of the factory. After two weeks a Shift Manager reassigned me to the shipping department, located at the west end of the facility. My task was to move pallets containing sealed boxes containing products through the large yellow warehouse gate. Although tenuous at start, due to long working hours, hectic work intervals and night shifts, my research period at the factory was fruitful, permitting me to describe work relations and corporate practices. Day-to-day activities varied from pleasant lunch breaks to stressful, often frightening control procedures enacted by the factory's security personnel. Also, acts of imposing discipline, spontaneous layoffs for minor misconduct and work related accidents were common occurrences during my time at the factory. I resigned invoking the academic year's start, but actually handing in my key-card was the only requirement set by the management. At that time, Nokia was still "always hiring" and operators like myself were easy to replace.

My ethnography reveals how employees were encased in an intricately segmented production process geared towards satisfying the company's accumulation strategies, all the while being controlled by superiors and security agents often through punitive procedures. In addition, Nokia successfully made use of two procedures in order to maintain labour costs as low as legally possible: primarily through outsourcing, and secondarily through employing rural workers. Outsourcing meant that Nokia delegated worker management responsibilities to human resource companies. Attributions included hiring, managing on the factory floor and remunerating employees. External employees formed the majority of the factory's workforce, "benefitting" from short term contracts ranging from two weeks to three months, while also being remunerated

with minimum wages. Rural labour force employment was advantageous due to the fact that workers' means of subsistence were partially satisfied by their agrarian households, thus allowing them to survive on low wages, which were nonetheless crucial sources of cash in the context of income-poor rural areas..

### **Cluj's Economic Metamorphoses – From Ethno-Nationalism to Neoliberalism**

Prior to 2004, the city of Cluj-Napoca had a conservative-nationalist administration that strongly opposed foreign direct investments. Gheroghe Funar was the mayor of Cluj-Napoca between 1992 and 2004 and the leading political actor behind the city's nationalistic policies. His success was attributed to factors from the socialist period as well as the post-socialist one. During the socialist era, Funar's former popularity was linked to Ceaușescu's foreign policies and to local tensions derived from forced urbanization procedures. The first factor was justified by Ceaușescu's anti-Soviet neo-Stalinist nationalism which was already embedded in the general population's identity. Locally, a more complex set of circumstances were in play. Similarly to most state planned economies, rigid bureaucratic factory organization was overcome by informal bargaining for supplies and factory specific worker coalitions (Burawoy, 1979, 1985; Pittaway, 1999, 2007). In this equation, ethnicity, as well as local origin (i.e. residence in a particular neighbourhood) were used as negotiation resources, generating local competition and rivalry. More specifically, the emerging ethnic and spatial tensions between Hungarians occupying the city centre and Romanians from peripheral neighbourhoods were later incorporated in Funar's nationalist discourse.

After the collapse of state socialism, economic restructuring meant that workers were no longer considered the country's main driving force for accumulation. Numerous factories, unable to compete at a transnational level, still relied on state support and many were on the verge of bankruptcy. This meant mass dismissals, rising unemployment rates and a general feeling of discontent among workers. The new liberal state, and with its political and economic elite were blamed for diminishing production rates and implicitly for working people's troubled existence.

Therefore, by coupling worker anxieties with historical ethnic tensions, Funar was able to construct a nationalist discourse, insisting that Cluj was a Romanian city, and promising that he would re-appropriate the city centre, thus uniting former working class neighbourhood inhabitants and obscuring the general state of anxiety present amongst workers. Drawing upon these aspects, Funar rose to power due to his fervent opposition to other ethnic groups, mainly Hungarians. The latter comprised 19.75% of the population of Cluj-Napoca

(146.186 residents) according to 1992 census data<sup>2</sup>, constituting the second largest ethnic group after Romanians. Emphasizing economic protectionism, he also opposed any foreign investment, arguing that he is not a “sell-out” and that we need to keep our dignity and resist “foreign thievery”. Most of Funar’s electorate was formed by post-socialist working class people stemming from the city’s major socialist working class neighbourhoods: Mărăști and Mănăștur. After 12 years of stalling the region’s economic reconfiguration, Funar lost the 2004 mayoral elections, mainly due to pressure coming from the country’s integration into the European Union in 2000. As a result, after the 2004 mayoral elections the political context and economic orientation of the city changed dramatically. The newly appointed liberal mayor, Emil Boc, actively encouraged transnational companies to invest in Cluj, thus the area was included in the global economic network. In this context, Cluj County became a regional centre, receiving significant transnational capital flows which included Nokia’s investment (Petrovici, 2011, 2012).

### **De-Territorialization and Regional Competitiveness**

Globalization is understood as the politics which organizes the contemporary economic system, where the national economy becomes dependent on the global one. It is a qualitative transformation of capitalism which led to a new relation of economic interdependence, transcending the nation-states (Bonefeld, 2003). A similar point is made by Brenner (1999) when he emphasizes the “post-territorial geographies” generated by globalization, which precedes the decline of the “territorial state”. In a more metaphorical manner, Negri and Hardt (2001) describe the global economy and the global production circuits as integrated elements of a new global order, a new political subject or a “sovereign power that governs the world”. However, it does not represent an expansion of nation-states sovereignty but a decentralized and de-territorialized system of governance, encompassing biopower and forming a “society of control”, containing a technology of power internalized by individuals thus encompassing “every element of social life” (Negri and Hardt, 2001:26).

Economic de-territorialization presupposes a “reconfiguration of the economic functions of the state” (Jessop, 1994:262). Supply and demand regulation at a national level is replaced by the need to ensure international competitiveness. According to Jessop (1993, 1994, 2003) state intervention consists of increasing the competitiveness of a certain area in order to entice transnational companies’ investments, the main agents of the global economy. This model is viewed as

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/RPL2002INS/vol4/tabele/t1.pdf> [Last accessed: 01.05.2015].

one which ensures stable development and prosperity at the local level. The purpose of the “competitive state” is to “secure economic growth within its borders and/or to secure competitive advantages for capitals based in its borders” (Jessop, 2003:96). From a similar perspective, Brenner (1999) characterizes de-territorialization as an accumulation strategy used by capital in order to bypass “constraints imposed by national territorial boundaries” (1999:64). This implies that the functions of the nation-state are crumbling and that we are witnessing a re-territorialization or re-scaling of the state in order to better suit the emerging globalization process. However, the notion of re-territorialization does not postulate the “disappearance of the state”, it merely refers to permeability between states illustrated by transnational capital flows.

Increasing a territory’s competitiveness is achieved through subsidies given to transnational companies by local authorities, alongside investments in infrastructure and education. The latter is based on the idea that education is important for preparing the future labour force. In the case of Nokia, all these three requirements were fulfilled. Firstly, the company received significant tax exemptions at its arrival. In fact, the company did not have to pay any taxes for thirty years. Normal obligations would have included a 1.75 euro concession rate per square meter, plus a 1.85 euro maintenance tax. Zincă (2011) provides an extensive account of how Cluj’s administration negotiated with Nokia and how the result of this interaction clearly benefitted the latter. At the same time, it offers an outside view on the subject, in contrast with my inside perspective. Secondly, Cluj was and still is an important academic centre, home to a number of well-known universities that register more than 100,000 students. Thirdly, the infrastructure, Tetarom III industrial park, had been already built by the time of Nokia’s arrival, with funds allocated by the County Council, thus the table had been already laid for hosting global capital.

Press articles show this in detail: “the Romanian Government assigned 120 billion lei towards infrastructure construction of the Tetarom III industrial park in Cluj County. Romania’s prime-minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu stated that this investment paves the way for the establishment of this technological park. Tetarom III will include a Nokia factory set to produce electronic equipment. The total sum allocated will be approximately 200 million euros. About 15000 jobs will be created here” (Monitorul de Cluj, July 25th 2007). Tetarom III is one of three industrial parks<sup>3</sup> built around Cluj, it is also the largest, stretching over 120 hectares. All three industrial parks belong to a state owned company, the City Council being its main shareholder. Local press defines the industrial park as:

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<sup>3</sup> A fourth Tetarom industrial park is currently under construction near Feleacu, south of Cluj-Napoca.



**Figure 1.** Map of Tetarom Industrial Parks in Cluj County

... a delimited zone in which economic activities, scientific research or technological development, industrial and service production takes place. This park is established as a joint venture between local public administration, economic agents, research-development institutions or other interested partners, who therefore conclude an association agreement (Gazeta de Cluj, October 19<sup>th</sup> 2008).

Furthermore, Nokia's departure was explained as a rational decision that the county could have expected:

Nokia left Jucu and Romania in a similar way it did Bochum...the invoked reasons were also identical: the company intends to reduce costs and streamline production by moving to Asia (Gazeta de Cluj, September 30<sup>th</sup> 2011).

Nokia's press release offers more details:

[The company] wants to adjust its mobile phone production by moving closer to main distribution centres and key markets. Therefore, Nokia intends to close the Cluj factory before the end of 2011. The reason behind this decision was that Asian production facilities are capable of larger scale operations (Mediafax, September 29<sup>th</sup> 2011).

The industrial park occupied by Nokia after its relocation in 2007 from Germany is a visible example of the ways in which global competitiveness and a low-wage race-to-the-bottom, induced by the global economy, manifested itself in Cluj.

### **The Path to Flexibilization: Labour Code Changes and Work Relations Restructuring**

In addition to the regional competitiveness narrative, Romania's government proposed a so called "deregulation of work relations" necessary for foreign investments. In other words, a "flexibilization" of labour power was deemed appropriate for solving the "rigidity problem" present within the country's post-socialist workforce. The New Labour Code<sup>4</sup> adopted in May 2011 achieved this by allowing unlimited short-term work contracts<sup>5</sup>, equivalent to testing periods. Therefore, employers were granted the right for individual or collective dismissals without any legal burdens (Stoiciu, 2010). Also, companies were permitted to impose so called "internal performance standards" as they saw fit. Unions or any other type of worker coalitions were discouraged with a clause stating that during collective strikes the work contract is suspended. Initially, collective contracts were to be discarded entirely, but union negotiations stopped this from happening. To justify Labour Code changes, the government invoked a need to increase the competitiveness of Romania on the international level. The plan to achieve this task was by generating cheap labour power with the hope of attracting foreign investments. These measures of flexibilization decreased the legal protection workers had, raising their level of subordination in front of employers even further. In sum, these reforms were negotiated in 2010 and implemented in 2011 by modifying the Labour Code thus leading to the "defeat of worker unions" (Guga, 2014).

In the case of Nokia, union negotiations took place after the announcement regarding the factory's relocation was made public. Collective contracts did not include any type of compensation in case of dismissal. A large amount of press articles documented this issue (see list of online articles analysed at the end of the text), emphasizing carelessness and blaming the unions for not taking contract negotiations seriously. The leader of one of the largest worker unions from the factory, "Nokia Metal" (one out of two worker unions tied to Nokia, the second was "Sindicatul Liber Nokia"), argued that nobody could have anticipated that the factory would close this soon.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.codulmuncii.ro/> [Last accessed: 01.05.2015].

<sup>5</sup> Previously, the Labour Code stipulated that only three employees can occupy a given position for probation periods.

Asked about this affair, Romania's Minister of Labour at the time declared that: "they [unions or workers] have to answer for this. I am sure that Cluj County Council will take steps towards declassifying those contracts" (Mediafax, October 6<sup>th</sup> 2011). Recognizing the gravity of this situation, the Labour Minister made efforts to address Nokia directly, overruling the worker unions. After deliberations, the Minister guaranteed that "negotiations with the unions will be fair, the employees will have their rights protected, but those who refuse to work will support the consequences" (Mediafax, October 7<sup>th</sup> 2011), thus ensuring that some negotiations take place. It was evident that everyone stood at Nokia's mercy, the lack of any legal obligation meant that the company could have departed without offering any compensation. Despite this fact, compensations were given to every employee still present at the factory in December 2011. Every union representative was pleased with this outcome: [...] "it is the most we can get given the present socio-economic conditions. [...] It is the most advantageous package we could acquire" (Mediafax, November 4<sup>th</sup> 2011).

Legislation reforms aimed to change not only the directly visible work relations but also to build or welcome a new type of worker who is in tune with the legal considerations mentioned above. Therefore, in opposition with the post-communist workers model that formed Romania's labour power in the past, the new desirable employee had to be educated, obedient, responsible and autonomous – simply put, flexible, thus mirroring global market flexibility oriented accumulation imperatives. The "lazy" post-communist worker model or "clerk" – portrayed as lacking job dedication due to his self-centred conception – was used as a negative point of reference by neoliberal discourses in order to legitimize the desirable autonomous and flexible employee or "entrepreneur" (Simionca, 2012). "What is important is the forging of a new image of work, based upon a new image of the worker" as Rose (1999:116) rightly noted. The image refers to an ideal working subject who places his own interests after those of the company's he is working for, a person who is passionate about his work and finds personal fulfilment within it. As Petrovici (2013) argues, East European neoliberalism is a "political-ethical project that aims not only to design markets, but also to enact moral transformation: to get rid of the old communist habits and practices" (2013:24).

Despite this utopian imaginary, the discourses surrounding this "autonomous subjectivity" obscures the precarious context in which employees find themselves in due to current work relation reconfigurations. Shortly phrased, flexibilization leads to precarity (Bourdieu, 1999; Standing, 2003). This is achieved by promoting an imagined construction in which the figure of the "free agent" is actively involved in decision making at the workplace (Deetz, 2003). In other words, using this illusion of liberty, combined with the rational choice argument concerning the work contract, the identity of the new ideal worker is defined and justified.

## Rallying the Outsourced, Commuter Workforce

Nokia's shop floor was comprised of two types of employees, those belonging to Nokia and external workers who had contracts with HR firms. These firms collaborated with Nokia during the later years of the factory's activity in Cluj. Their main role was to supply outsourced labour power, mainly used as unskilled labour on the shop floor. The primary difference between these two types of workers was that those pertaining to Nokia have been hired directly by the factory's management in the first years of activity. External employees, as mentioned, had contracts with a number of HR companies, they were hired and managed directly by the representatives of these firms in the factory.

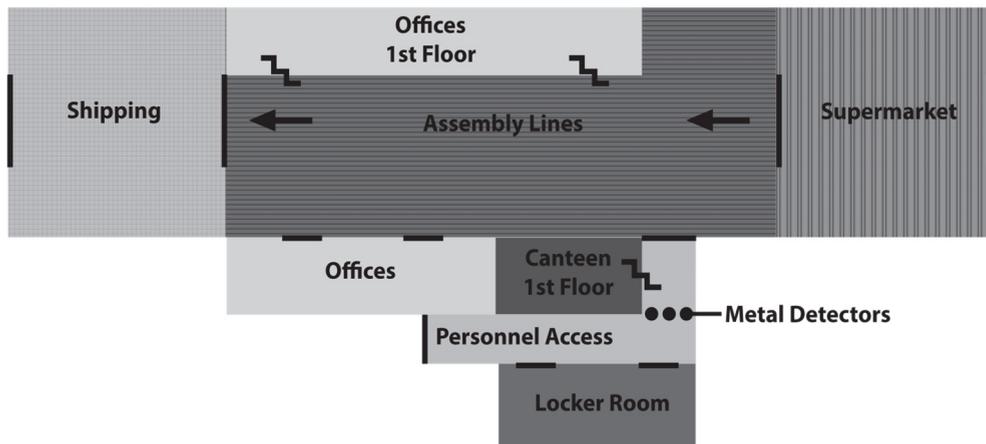
The recruitment process took place at the HR firm's headquarters, completely separate from Nokia. From my experience as a former external employee, this process was a simple one, consisting of a basic interview and filling out a form. The only unpleasant aspect was that enthusiastic future employees overcrowded the place. The next morning, most of those people were on the bus to the factory awaiting their first day of work.

The factory's work schedule was organized in 12 hour day and night shifts. Employees were divided into four work groups: A, B, C and D, thus ensuring that production was continuous, 24 hours per day and 7 days a week. These four groups succeeded each other on the shop floor: after day shifts a specific group had a 24 hour break, automatically entering a night shift the next day. After night shifts the break was 48 hours. The work cycle was renewed by re-entering a day shift the second day after. A work day had four breaks: two short 10 minute coffee and smoke breaks, one 20 minute "snack" brake and a 30 minute lunch or supper break, depending on the shift. Employees also benefited from 30 free coffees per month, accessible via the vending machines situated near the recreation areas.

Internal hierarchies were symbolized by emblems bearing the initials of every rank on a different background colour. For example, the lowest rank, operators, had green badges inscribed with the letters OP. Also, key operators (KO) and forklift drivers (FD) were also "greens". Intermediate ranks such as material handlers (MH) or coordinators (MC) had yellow backgrounds and superior ones, predominantly supervisors (SU) or shift managers (SM), were represented by red badges. Department managers had black emblems inscribed with their entire rank, not just initials: "Shipping Manager" or "Production Manager".

Higher ranks were held predominantly by internal employees, while Operators were mostly external. Promotions in the case of external workers were largely limited due to the fact that when superior positions opened up, Nokia employees were the first in line to occupy them: "higher ranks were always hunted by Nokia employees" (M, 21 years old, Material Coordinator).

This did not mean that advancement was impossible for external workers. One interviewee stated that he was promoted from Operator to Material Handler, then Material Coordinator in a matter of two years. Although, the same respondent later said that in four years he only saw a handful of such cases among external employees.



**Figure 2.** The Nokia Factory's Layout

The chain of production (see Figure 2) started from the “supermarket”, went through the assembly lines and ended in the shipping department. Located at the west end of factory, the “supermarket” housed raw materials needed for product assembly: unfolded cardboards, mobile phone batteries, headsets, cases, instruction manuals among others. This section was managed by material coordinators on order list, or “object list” basis. Supervisors or key operators compiled a list of materials needed for a given order and the “supermarket” employees would prepare and deliver the components via a pallet lifter. The assembly lines formed the largest section of the factory. It included a sizeable number of production units, each numbered accordingly: 1A, 2A, ... 9A, 1B and so on. Each unit contained three to six assembly operators, depending on product complexity. Every operator had two tasks: folding the small box and placing the instruction manual, mounting the case and testing the phone or sealing and registering the finished product. A finished order could contain up to 1,024 products, one product meant a box including one mobile phone. Assembly lines were managed by KO's. Depending on experience, each KO had two to four lines in his care. Their task was to initiate the work order, verify materials and ensure that production is fluid. Every production unit was connected to the factory's internal monitoring program. A display screen mounted at one end of the unit

revealed order status, work rate and other production efficiency indicators. Supervisors used this information to maintain internal performance standards. Usually they spoke only to KO's, but in some cases, supervisors would warn assembly operators to increase their work pace. Ignoring these warnings often determined the spontaneous dismissal of an entire assembly unit on account of unsatisfactory work efficiency and lack of dedication. The shipping department represented the factory's main storage area. Pallets containing finished products were inserted via the warehouse gate, verified thoroughly by a gatekeeper and deposited on shelves with the help of forklifts. The main task of shipping employees was to gather pallets belonging to the same order. Often, due to large orders, products were placed on a random empty shelf. By using a "pick list", operators would search scattered boxes and arrange them for transportation. Preparation for transport initiated the final packaging procedure: depending on the destination and type of product, operators needed to place boxes in large wooden or cardboard crates which were then deposited onto trucks.

Men and women were equally present on the shop floor, except for forklift drivers, who were exclusively men. In contrast, women distinctively occupied the offices, human resources specialists were all women. Apart from these two cases of "gendered jobs", women and men collaborated at every level of factory. Assembly lines were mostly mixed, and also the shipping department included both genders regardless of activity. I knew a small number of ethnic Hungarians during my time as an operator, but ethnicity was an undistinguishable aspect in general. Romanian was the only spoken language on the shop floor, and except for rank emblems, no other visible credentials were worn by employees. Wage differences among internal and external employees were also notable. Despite the fact that wages were confidential, interviewees willingly described the financial aspect in casual conversations. As such, Nokia employees had gross wages ranging from 1,500 to 2,000 lei, roughly 350-400 Euro/month, external employees had an initial salary of 700 lei in the first month, which increased to 800 lei in the third month. Of course this comparison is made only between workers holding similar ranks, in this case the lowest possible one: operators. Also, the gross minimum wage from 2012 in Romania was 700 lei, identical with the external employees starting salary.

The internal rules of the factory stipulated that salaries can increase up to 7%, meaning that, in the case of external employees, the approximately 800 lei was the most they could have possibly received in case that they started from the minimum national wage. In addition, this increase was achieved through the so called "evaluations", likewise these were made only in the case of external employees. But this has not been the only purpose of these evaluation practices. External employees had short-term contracts: from two weeks to three months. The length of this period was also determined by evaluations.

According to the statements of a few former employees, evaluations were guided by meritocratic standards, meant to reward dedication and performance at the workplace. Evaluation practices were conducted by employees with superior rank compared to the ones being evaluated. For example, an operator was evaluated by a key operator who has been responsible for the former's activities, his direct superior. Furthermore, the HR firms' representatives had an important role to play in these practices. They used three categories to assess external employee's performance: "improvement", "on target" and "excellent". "Improvement" meant that the worker was underperforming and was in danger of being fired. On target indicated that the contract was going to be extended and excellent suggested that in addition to the extension of the contract a certain bonus was to be expected.

In practice, the evaluations resembled a routine control, a verification process meant to ensure the employee's compliance with the factory's requirements. Furthermore, its aim was to motivate individuals, to guarantee future dedication using mechanisms of power, which depict workers as objects, instruments used by managerial actions. This reveals the fact that conventional managerial practices limit individual autonomy and assert domination through instrumental rationality (Alvesson, Levy and Willmott, 2003). In this conceptual framework, HR experts select, develop and reward employees. Organization's HR departments form a functionalist maintenance system, "an organizational black box" that manages a given resource, represented by labour power. Also, cataloguing every employee's status is a basic form of exercising disciplinary power over individuals. Management along with HR specialists impose discipline and organize the shop floor as a space in which individual activities can be observed, mapped and governed.

Considered as "organic intellectuals" or "symbolic elites", HR specialists define the representational system within an organization, controlling the dominant discourse, dictating how things should be done using a disciplinary technology which produces an "invisible type of power" internalized by employees. Inducing normalization, the values and beliefs promoted by dominant discourse – beneficial for the organization – are treated as normal occurrences, thus suppressing resistance along with alternative ways of thinking (Clegg, 1989; Deetz, 2003). Organizational culture encompasses discourses which advocate the desired values, beliefs and goals. Described as a system of meanings, this culture is used as an instrument to achieve organizational goals. Additionally, it is also an ideological instrument of control influenced by the political context in which it is present, thus legitimating certain activities and condemning others (Alvesson, 2002; Mateescu, 2009). The opposition presented above, between the post-socialist worker's model and the "new" autonomous employee exemplifies this aspect.

Investing in a vast transportation system also contributed to the reduction of labour costs. By employing a transportation firm, Nokia's logistics experts built a transportation network encompassing urban and rural areas surrounding Jucu. This meant that hundreds, if not thousands of workers would commute daily, generating significant workflows in the area. Labour costs were kept low by employing rural unskilled workers as operators. The logic behind this idea was that rural workers already owned a household which produced several food items, thus partly ensuring their means of subsistence. Therefore, work in the factory was only a way to supplement income, justifying minimum wages.

Emphasizing various degrees of proletarianization, Petrovici (2013) analyzes labour production strategies in Cluj County. He depicts that partial proletarianization resulting from the "combined income-strategy" (combining rural household resources with minimum wage) is used by multinationals to maintain labour costs at a minimum. In this framework, Cluj and implicitly Nokia were also actors of "jumping scale" strategies which interconnected resources originating from rural households and factory employment remunerated with minimum wage. Although in this case an indirect, or intermediary level of jumping scale is observable. The aforementioned outsourcing via HR companies represents a third party in Nokia's instance.

### **Role of the Security Firm**

The security firm has been appointed due to the alleged thefts and losses registered by the factory in its early years of activity. Security agents wore grey uniforms and were equipped with radios for communication between different security outposts. A number of outposts were placed at key points on the shop floor to ensure the most efficient monitoring possible. Security personnel's assignments consisted of imposing the factory's internal regulations, penalizing certain misconducts and verifying the products – making sure that the bar codes or models correspond with the inscription on the boxes and ensuring that nothing is missing from an order.

By all intents and purposes, security agents formed a separate group compared to the rest of the employees. Whereas all types of workers – belonging to Nokia or external – had the same transportation system – common buses and personnel vans – security agents travelled with one distinct bus designated only for them. They spent their breaks in the dressing room, an area off limits for employees during shift hours. These practices visibly fragmented solidarity between security personnel and workers. Security's interactions with the other employees were confined to short conversations avoiding friendly discussions about anything else except work. A certain level a co-operation was of course necessary for an efficient production process.

Security agents' power was visible from their mode of conduct and their attitude towards other workers. The measures which they could have implemented were well known: the mildest one was a report depicting certain disciplinary violations, performing an alcohol test and, in the worst case, suspension which most likely meant dismissal. In addition to this, a demonstration of power occurred at the exit, when the shift ended. Employees had to pass through metal detectors similar to those found at the airports, located in the personnel access corridor. These were situated next to main entrance, opposite the dressing rooms. If someone triggered the detectors three times in a row he was asked to step into a separate compartment where he was undressed and each piece of clothing was scanned manually by a security agent.

Depicting from my own experience, security's display of force was often impressive. Additional guards wearing black riot gear, equipped with police batons and tear gas were brought in, most likely to keep the factory's disorganized mob of workers in order. The surrounding environment during these controls was permeated by general chaos. Shipping employees needed to wear boots with metal insertions, thus they were asked to remove their footwear every time during these control procedures. Also, the risk of losing the bus ride home increased the stress factor. An interviewee accurately described this control routine:

You were checked when you entered, at the gate, to make sure that you don't possess any forbidden items like a phone, weapons, tools, alcohol and at the exit with metal detectors to ensure that you don't take anything. People suspected of stealing goods were taken in a room, stripped and verified (M, 21 years old, Material Coordinator).

A compelling example of the measures used by security agents has been the suspension of an important, high ranking employee for misconduct. Among other attributions, this particular worker was also a forklift driver. One day, while taking a corner too fast he provoked an accident: the boxes he was transporting fell off, hitting a bystander and injuring him. He was immediately sent home, and penalized: demoted to an inferior rank in addition to a two week suspension. He did not accept this decision and resigned. The following day, security's manager came down and showed the workers the video recording of the incident, stressing, if not threatening, the importance of dedication and attentiveness at the workplace.

Assuming the role of peacekeepers, security agents created asymmetric power relations on the shop floor. Power, as Foucault (2005) defined it, is a specific type of relation between individuals, where some people can determine

other people's behaviour, but not in a directly coercive manner. Emphasis is placed on disciplinary mechanisms, not the use of force. Maintaining respect for the factory's internal rules and standards, security agents acted as direct organizers of labour power when all other, "softer" ways of disciplining failed. Often through punitive practices, security created a reality in which domination was visibly manifested and power exerted on a day-to-day basis. Their presence as agents of power who oversee the entire production process generated self-surveillance. By directly observing activities, security agents pressured workers to assume their designated positions, performing their assigned tasks, thus constituting docile bodies (Foucault, 2004, 2009) suited for the extraction of surplus value.

Employees reacted to this treatment after the factory was closed. For most interviewees, Nokia's departure was good news:

I was happy, the slavery was over. Others were upset because they couldn't find any jobs, especially people from rural areas" (M, 30 years old, Material Handler).

Employees were revolted, but I personally was joyful. I wanted to leave this firm for a long time. I wanted a normal workplace, where even if I wasn't better paid, I'd have a stable work schedule, a permanent contract, free weekends, no night shifts and less responsibility per shift (M, 32 years old, Production Planner).

## **Conclusion**

Labour is made cheap through a number of processes, a succession of practices which have as a result the most inexpensive workforce legally possible within a given country, the one remunerated with the minimum wage. These processes are interrelated, one derives from the other: being part of the global economic network legitimized the Labour Code changes which in turn led to the so called "measures of workforce flexibilization", significantly weakening workers' rights and granting even more power to employers.

The present study aimed to reveal the particular ways in which Nokia attempted to reduce labour costs in its offshore company from Cluj county during the two years of its stay on Tetarom III industrial platform constructed by the County Council. The company collaborated with a number of human resources firms in order to benefit from outsourced labour power paid at the minimum legal wage. External employees, who were managed exclusively by the HR companies representatives on the shop floor, constituted the majority

of the factory's workforce. Flexibilization was put in practice by short term contracts and constant evaluations which contributed to the uncertainty surrounding external employees. Additionally, power imbued security agents increased the pressure to perform on the shop floor, maximizing the factory's output as much as possible. At the end, however, none of these practices "produced" enough surplus value for the company's expectations.

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## THE FLYING DUTCH JOB. JOBS THAT MIGRATE FROM THE NETHERLANDS TO ROMANIA

DIANA MARIANA POPA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** In the present article I discuss the migration of work from the West towards the East, making direct references to this kind of work relocation between the Netherlands and Romania. More specifically, this article focuses on the Dutch language based activities relocated or outsourced to Romania, a situation which puts customers in contact with “brains without bodies” or “invisible work-migrants”. In order to highlight the trend of migrating jobs I take a look at the evolution of job advertisements for Dutch speakers in Romania. Then, I investigate the impact that the international relocation of back-office and front-office business activities has both on the employees who take over the activity and on the customer’s satisfaction. Factors such as linguistic similarity, cultural practices, and attitudes towards customers’ complaints shape the outcomes of such relocations. Given that the otherness between employees and customers can be faster noticed in the direct, “voice-to-voice” interaction, the situation of call-centres deserves special attention for the analysis. Call-centres clearly feature the characteristics of non-places, where the employee must assume a similar identity to that of the customer.

**Keywords:** migration, work, Dutch, culture, language

### Introduction

The presence of work migrants in Western countries captured public attention and raised many debates, both in the mass media and the online social environment, in the context of economic crisis and widespread job shortage. The Dutch media frequently discussed about the ending of work restrictions on the local job market for Romanian and Bulgarian citizen starting with 2014. During these discussions, concerns were often expressed about the expected new wave of Eastern European work migrants (from Romania and Bulgaria) towards the West. These discussions took place on the background of the 2013 Dutch public agenda’s

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primary concern with the cohabitation (*het samenleven* in Dutch), as this remained the most important problem in the view of the Dutch public (Dekker and Possumus, 2013).

The purpose of this article is to reveal a more complex picture, one that entails a less visible, yet undoubtedly connected trend: the job migration from the West towards the East, based on business decisions and cost analysis of large companies, a process which puts “brains without bodies” in contact. At the present moment, such a trend can be clearly depicted in Romania, where more and more foreign companies relocate business activities, thanks to the cheaper qualified work force that can be employed here for serving distantly located foreign populations by means of computer mediated communication.

Both individual labour migration and job migration based on business decisions can be linked to the phenomenon of globalization, although at different levels. As Jessop (2005) notes, “globalization” is a chaotic concept and “globalisation is generally better interpreted as the complex resultant of many different processes than as a distinctive causal process in its own right” (Jessop, 2005:17). The heightened capital mobility and the internationalization of production have also facilitated the international mobility of labour (Sassen, 1988). In the present day economy, job opportunities are seen to be less tied to space and time (Sweet and Meiksins, 2013) following the radical transformation of these two fundamental dimensions of human life determined by the new communication systems (Castells, 2000). As such, after the migration of manufacturing work towards the East, where manual labour is cheaper, the migration of service sector work can also be seen:

Service activities have been fostered by the growth of skilled workforces overseas and by the rapidly decreasing cost of information technology and communicating over the Internet, just as the offshoring of manufactured goods was fostered by low-cost offshore manufacturing and decreases in transportation costs (Gomez et al., 2013: 149).

The subject of outsourcing and of job relocation is of course not new and the reason for which companies undertake such activities is quite straightforward: cost savings. The same activity can be differently remunerated depending on the location of the employee performing it. This is why the increased presence of American multinational corporations in Europe and Asia, for example, set up a new trend of multi-locational production as “beyond the actual movement of people across borders, there is growing interconnection between workers in the country they work and the rest of the world, through global flows of production, money (remittances) information and culture” (Castells, 2000:131). This labour interdependence is exemplified by Castells with the cases of Bombay and Bangalore, two cities that have become major subcontractors of software for companies

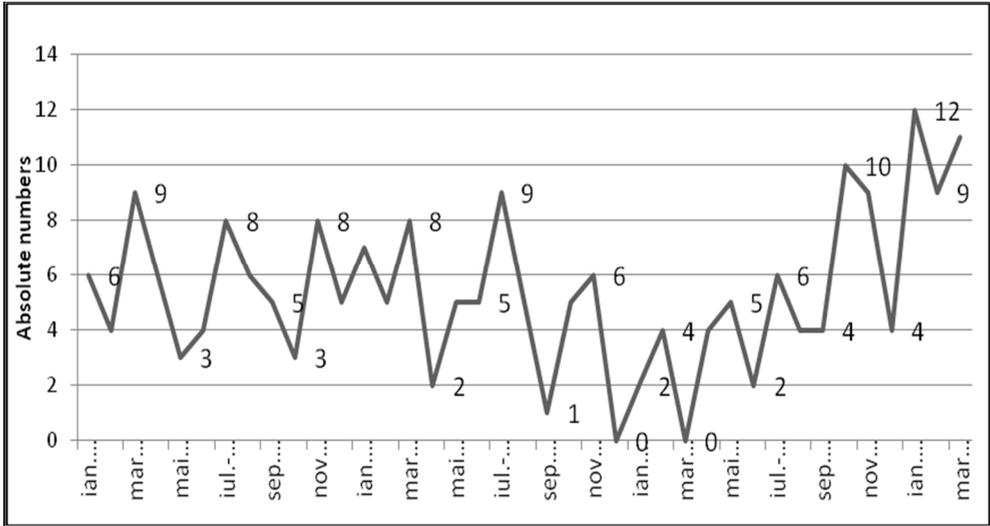
around the globe, due to the use of thousands of highly skilled Indian engineers and computer scientists who receive only 20% of the remuneration paid in the US for a similar job (Castells, 2000).

Similarly, in Romania Dutch speakers working in relocated activities are better paid than the country's average wage, but still they have a substantially lower salary than their native speaker equivalent found in the Netherlands or Belgium. German is another foreign language in demand at the moment in the service sector and German speakers can also demand a salary higher than the national average. Very often service sector jobs in multinational organizations require a combination of competences that include English and another foreign language. Because the offer for English speakers is high (higher than that for German or Dutch speakers) employers can conduct a much more thorough selection of English speaking candidates.

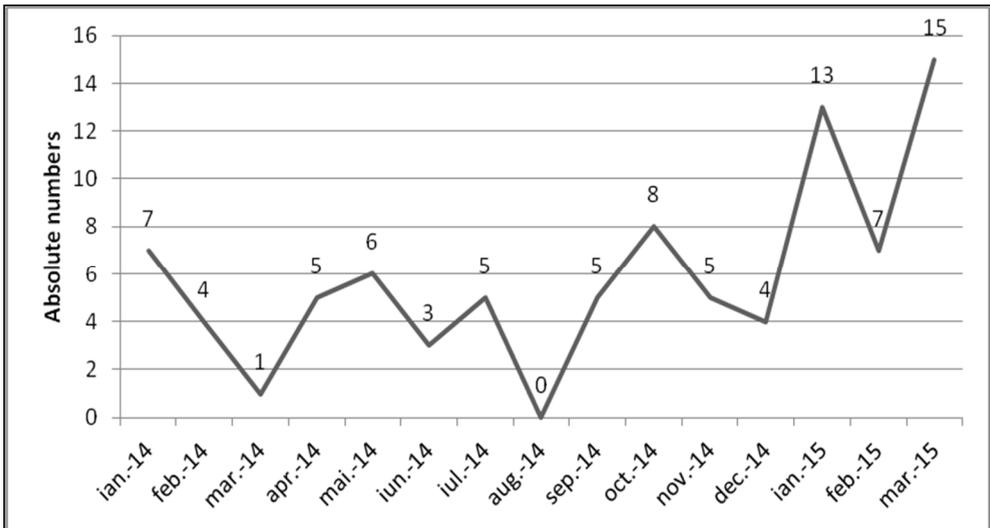
### **Case study: demand for Dutch speakers**

In order to give a clearer picture of the “migrating jobs” trend, I looked at the demand for Dutch speakers on the Romanian job market, based on the number of advertised jobs. The starting point for this article consist therefore of a quantitative analysis of the job advertisements for Dutch speakers on two large and popular job advertising websites from Romania. On these two websites I searched for all job postings containing the English word “Dutch” in the title. I eliminated from the results the duplicated posts (the same job advertisement placed more than once in the same month). I didn't include the search results that only had the Romanian equivalents of the word “Dutch”, meaning “olandeză” and “neerlandeză”, as these were quite few and the jobs advertised with these Romanian words in the title had a different character, detailed below. However, some of the jobs in the service sector that contain the English word “Dutch” in the title also include the Romanian word “olandeză”. I did not take into account the number of opened positions included in one job offer. In other words, I equalled one advertisement with one open position/job, even though some advertisements mentioned more than one opening.

In Figure 1 the evolution of the job advertisements for the time period January 2012 - March 2015 can be seen, based on the data gathered from the first advertising website. For this 39 months period the total number of advertised jobs for Dutch speakers was 211, and a constant offer of jobs for Dutch speakers can be observed, with a moderate increase in the last months.



**Figure 1.** Evolution of job advertisements between January 2012 and March 2015. Data collected from the 1<sup>st</sup> job advertising website<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 2.** Evolution of job advertisements between January 2014 and March 2015. Data collected from the 2<sup>nd</sup> job advertising website

<sup>2</sup> Upon request, the names of the websites can be provided by the author to interested individuals.

A similar trend can also be observed in Figure 2, based on data gathered from the second job advertising website investigated, which only offers an archive with the advertised jobs for the previous and the current year (meaning 2014 and 2015). The total number of advertised jobs for Dutch speakers for this 15 months period was 88. A general decrease of the number of advertised jobs can be observed in both figures in the summer and winter months, with the sharpest decrease around the months of August and December, but this could be considered a general trend in job advertising as these periods coincide with vacations and holidays.

Even if at present the absolute number remains small, a steady increase in the job offers can be depicted in both figures. On both websites, most of the jobs can be included in the general category of “Customer Care Services” but the range of job offers based on the knowledge of the Dutch language is quite diverse and includes the following: IT help desks for both B2B (business to business) and B2C (business to customer) regarding hardware & software support, simple accountancy for B2B or B2C or other finance related activities, human resources related activities, GPS (global positioning system) live assistance for the automobile industry, database administration or data analysis, different kinds of web-content support or administration, online gaming and gambling assistance – either for social media applications or online casinos. Another smaller category on the two websites is that of jobs for Dutch speaking engineers. The jobs in the B2B category can be seen as „producer services” Sassen (1991), meaning specialized services dedicated to corporations and meant to further facilitate productive and commercial activity. What we are thus seeing is “an increasingly service-intensive mode of production” (Sassen, 1991:95).

As a result of the increasing demand for Dutch speakers, advertisements from private language schools seeking to employ Dutch language teachers also appear periodically on the job advertising websites, although considerably less frequent than the previously mentioned job categories. Another advertised job type is that of the Dutch speaking tourist guide. These two last mentioned types of jobs are usually advertised in Romanian. Another interesting remark is that jobs physically placed in other Eastern European countries are advertised in Romania. Some of the advertised jobs were not located in Romania, but in countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Poland. The fact that Dutch-speaking Romanians were invited to work in other Eastern European countries indicates that Romanian work force pool of Dutch speaking persons is considered productive and available for spatial mobility. It also shows that at the national level, neighbouring job markets and transnational corporations are in competition with each other for attracting scarce resources, in this case relatively cheap(er) Dutch speaking employees. As Jessop (2005) also notes, in the global job market,

local job markets (at regional/ national levels) enter into competition with each other even if they are thousands of miles apart.

The advertisements on these two Romanian websites do not give the full picture of the job market for Dutch speakers located in Romania. A Dutch speaker who places his or her CV on job advertising websites or on professional social networks will often be directly contacted by recruiters or by so called “headhunters” offering new job opportunities. In this case, previous experience in the service sector based on Dutch language competences makes for an even more attractive future employee. Also, some companies choose to place job advertisements only on their own websites, based on the idea that only the individuals who truly wish to work at that company will periodically check that website. Many jobs are also advertised through alumni online networks of former students of foreign languages.

Based on the above presented facts, it can be said that the demand for Dutch speakers in Romania is greater than the offer (the actual number of people who speak Dutch). These advertisements could be correlated with the reports of the National Bank of Romania (2013 & 2014), which show that the Netherlands is the largest foreign investor in Romania, with a share of the net foreign investments of 30.8% in 2012 and of 29.7% in 2013. However, the jobs mentioned above are not predominantly placed in Dutch companies who decided to expand or move their activity to Romania, but rather in other (non-Dutch) multinational companies, who provide services for the Dutch speaking population of the Netherlands and of Belgium.

How did this situation come to be? The wide use of IT&C plays a significant role, as jobs from the service sector are more easily displaced to cost saving locations such as Eastern Europe and Asia. A continuous exchange is thus conducted between countries offering cheap(er) work force and companies looking to increase their profits by reducing costs, companies that most of the time have their headquarters located in the developed, wealthy economies, where wages are high. The relatively cheap qualified work force found in Romania, together with other factors presented in the following, led to the rapid development of the outsourced services sector.

### **The migration of jobs**

Jobs migrate over country borders when a company decides to relocate or outsource to an international destination. Relocation and outsourcing are two solutions that companies use in order to lower costs. Relocation of an activity means that it is conducted in-house, within the company, but in another subsidiary

of that company, placed in a more cost effective location than the location of the headquarters. An activity can be either outsourced (placed outside of the borders of the company), it can be relocated to another country but still be kept in-house, or it can be both outsourced and relocated (moved to another organization and another country). International relocation of tasks and processes is sometimes cheaper than the use of local work force and the costs of relocation are amortized in time. For a multinational company it can be cheaper to centralise an activity in a single geographic low-cost location than to have a team doing the same activity in each country where it has a branch. A low cost location means lower wages, lower prices for renting or buying office space, lower taxes etc. The costs that the company has for producing a certain product or service would also be seen in the price of the product or of the service that the end user/customer has to pay. Again, Romania is seen as a good location to outsource based on the above mentioned aspects: lower wage levels for a highly skilled work force, lower rental or buying prices for office space, fast internet connection.

Attitudes towards work conflicts and the degree of labour unionization found in a certain country are also important factors taken into consideration by organizations deciding to outsource or relocate to a certain location. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are seen as having a relatively low frequency of strikes and of other manifestations of societal discontent (Bernaciak, 2015). As part of this region, Romania also has a low degree of work conflicts (strikes and other forms of protests) and also a very low degree of unionization (trade union membership) in the private service sector in particular. This trend was also influenced by the fact that the formation of trade unions became very difficult after the 2011 Labour Code. According to the *Benchmarking Working Europe* (2015) report of the European Trade Union Institute, collective bargaining coverage decreased in Romania with 47% between 2000 and 2012. The new Labour Code introduced in 2011 also made the processes of hiring and firing easier, introduced longer probation periods and extended the duration of fixed-term contracts and limited the right to strike (Bernaciak, 2015). These factors also contribute to the “attractiveness” of Romanian workforce in the eyes of transnational capital.

In the following sections I will focus on the relocated activities in the service sector performed in organizational structures placed in Romania, thus either outsourced to third parties or relocated to a branch in Romania but kept in-house, inside the large organization. This situation puts individuals from different countries in contact with “invisible work-migrants”. To clarify the discussion that follows, a few words are first needed on what makes the services sector. There have been several debates about the definition of the

“services sector”, first of all due to the fact that this sector has more often been defined based on what it is not rather than on what it is, and secondly because in the new information society it is even more difficult to distinguish the boundaries between goods and services (Castells, 2000). Several types of jobs in the service sector can migrate under the form of outsourced or offshored activities:

Under Business Process Outsourcing, whole work processes can be moved offshore as often occurs with ‘back-office’ functions such as human resources, finance and accounting. ‘Front-office’ functions that used to involve ‘face-to-face’ interactions have been supplanted by call centers that now deal with customers on a ‘voice-to-voice’ basis (Gomez et al., 2013: 149).

Both back-office and front-office activities can be outsourced and/or relocated. The activities conducted in call centres are “front-office” activities, the front line of a company’s interaction with its outside customers. As I have shown in previous section, the jobs advertised for Dutch speakers in Romania include both back-office activities (such as accounting, finance, human resources etc.) but also front-office activities (such as customer service activities that take place in call or contact centres). The international relocation of front-office activities can have a higher impact on customer satisfaction than the relocation of back-office activities, given that *otherness* becomes more obvious in this direct, “voice-to-voice” interaction. The activities developed in call centres are themselves so diverse that they have led to multiple views in the academic literature. Frenkel et al. (1999 apud. Taylor et al., 2002) for example, place the “front line” work activity developed in call centres under the larger umbrella of “knowledge work”. This study also pointed out that call centres employees don’t necessarily fit the profile of the prisoners of technology, meaning that the computer applications do not entirely control the actions of the workers. Castells (2000), on the other hand, believes that not all business services (call centre services included) are knowledge intensive, large part being computer-data processing jobs and some service-occupations being mostly semi-skilled. As Taylor et al. (2002) show, some use a quantitative evaluation of results, while others use a qualitative evaluation, depending also on the nature of tasks. To summarize, the mix between standardization and knowledge-intensive tasks can be quite diverse from one call centre to another.

If the horizontally structured global corporation is organized around process, measures performance based on customer satisfaction and rewards its employees based on team performance (Castells, 2000), the questions that the company has to answer before deciding to outsource are: “Would a client pay more for the help of a native speaker?” and “What would be the impact of

an activity performed by a non-native on customer satisfaction?”. The company must evaluate both the level of service quality in a certain location and the costs of relocation in that location. A company would also have to estimate the time it would take for a process to reach its pick performance after it was outsourced and/or relocated. The transfer of knowledge would most likely go from top to the bottom: first the higher managerial roles are instructed and then the lower, execution roles, but time will be needed to reach the previous quality level. In the following, I will turn to two other factors that firms employing service workers should take into account when deciding whether or not to relocate an activity, and, if so, to which location, namely linguistic similarity and cultural practices.

### **Foreign language knowledge**

The level of knowledge of a certain language is the key element in the hiring process in an outsourced or relocated activity. As Taylor et al. (2002) show, some call-centres have more quality based workflows, while others have more quantity based ones. The quality and quantity workflows are not to be seen as a dichotomy but rather as a continuum, meaning that each call centre presents a combination of both dimensions. It can be assumed that the level of knowledge of the foreign language must be higher in the more quality oriented call centre activity, as interaction with the customer is spontaneous due to low(er) task standardization. Standardization of tasks would lead to following a script when interacting with the customer. Strict transcript adherence can require a good pronunciation and a rather limited vocabulary while a flexible transcript or a lack thereof requires a rich vocabulary. The difference between front-end and back-end activities must be kept in mind when speaking about the visibility of otherness in the employee - client interaction. If in the case of back-office activities the possibility of perceiving the otherness of the employee is small, in the front-office type activities this possibility is high. The Dutch language based jobs mentioned in the first section of this article which were advertised on the Romanian employment websites can be divided into these two categories: back-office type jobs (in accountancy, human resources – primary selection, and some of the web content support activities) and front-office type jobs (all direct client-interaction related jobs).

Many outsourced and offshore activities are performed in the form of multi-language teams, meaning that the same activity is performed in several languages, serving more countries. This can be observed from the headlines of job advertisements from the two investigated job advertising websites, as the

titles contain several languages (for example: “*Credit & Collections Analyst – French/ German/ Polish/ Russian/ Dutch/ Italian/ Serbian*” or “*Call Centre Representative with one of the following languages: Hungarian, Italian, Portuguese, French, Finnish, Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Japanese, German, Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian and English*”). What would the activity in such a team look like? For example, a team of 50 persons performing an offshore activity can serve 5 countries, therefore creating 5 language based sub-teams. The distance between the language and the culture of a certain employee and the language and the culture of the country he or she is serving can differ between the 5 sub-teams.

When speaking about the time needed for the acquisition of a foreign language by a non-native speaker, there is no generally accepted method for the measurement of the distance between different languages that could predict it. However, some of the often used characteristics to make such differentiations between languages are the family tree and the grammar structure of a language. Individual (socioeconomic, demographic) characteristics also influence the time and level of acquisition of a foreign language by a non-native speaker (Barry and Miller, 2005). Coming back to the question “What would be the impact of an activity performed by a non-native speaker on client satisfaction?” certain differentiations have to be made between the language abilities of non-native speakers. Languages differ from each other in terms of grammar structure, among other aspects. For a person who has a synthetic mother tongue it could be more difficult to learn an analytic language than to learn a synthetic one. Pronunciation is another problem that could immediately differentiate a native speaker from a non-native, as for example the Dutch language has specific sounds not found in the Romanian language and the other way around. In regards to the Dutch language, a non-native speaker would also have to replicate and /or understand both the pronunciation of the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands and that of the Dutch spoken in Flanders, Belgium. Therefore, the answer to the previously stated question, regarding the impact of an activity performed by a non-native speaker on client satisfaction depends on each case, based on the distance between the mother tongue of the speaker and the foreign language s/he uses at work, and the previous experience of that person with that specific foreign language.

### **Differences in cultural practices**

Another aspect that could influence the quality of services offered in an outsourced or relocated format is the difference in cultural practices. The difference and distance between cultures can be theorized in more ways than

one, using for example the framework of Geert Hofstede (2001), Inglehart & Welzel (2010) or Edward Hall (1990) etc. These approaches received their share of critiques from the scholarly world, as up to this day it remains problematic to convincingly draw conclusions based on analyses that make inferences from the macro level to the micro one or the other way around. When speaking about cultural differences, dangers such as the ecological fallacy or overgeneralization must always be kept in mind.

Individuals from different cultures are also likely to resemble each other based on similar social class, generation, education, social status, religion, ethnicity etc. Many workers in the service sector are young and have a high level of education (as obviously they speak one or more foreign languages). Young Dutch language speakers from Romania enjoy also a higher than average salary, due to the scarcity of Dutch language speakers compared with the market demand. They can thus afford a cosmopolitan lifestyle that does not differ significantly from English or Dutch young adults from abroad. Still, there are differences in cultural practices that should be considered when talking about outsourcing or relocating business activities. Such cultural practices include the style of communication - difference in the level of formality/informality in written or verbal communication, the strict following versus the occasional bending of the rules and procedures, the speed of response (if not set through company policies), and even less obvious things, such as a certain sense of humour. Differences are also reflected in practices such as the strictness in filling in the forms, the need of a company stamp on the forms, the formal proof for claims and statements such as order dates, complaint reasons etc. which seem “normal” (taken for granted) for Romanian employees, while for Dutch employees might seem as “overdoing it”, or even possibly offensive, as they involve mistrusting one’s client/partner.

Another cultural difference that must be taken into consideration in the phenomenon of jobs migrating from the Netherlands towards Romania is the different approach towards expressing dissatisfaction, and complaining. The Dutch public is used and encouraged to express dissatisfaction in regard with the received services by registering a complaint. There are specialized Dutch websites in addressing and solving complaints from customers regarding various companies and services. Many companies offering goods or services to the general Dutch public as well as many public institutions have a “complaints” (“*klacht*” in Dutch) section on their website. The complaint section is often clearly visible on the homepage of the website. As a rule, the way of addressing is pleasing, most of the time formal (using the Dutch polite pronoun “U”) on the websites of the public institutions and mostly familiar on the websites of private companies. Such examples are: “Are you not satisfied with our services? We

would gladly like to know it” (website of a public institution), “Have we not fully met your expectations? Then let us know it!” (website of a private company in the service sector).

There are also numerous dedicated Dutch websites for learning how to write a complaint, some even dedicated to pupils or students. Having personally followed a bachelor degree in Dutch language and literature in Romania, I too had to learn how to write such a complaint for a class assignment<sup>3</sup>. I remember being quite intrigued at that time about one of the recommended closing formulas for such a complaint, namely “*Met vriendelijke groeten*”. This generally translates into English as “*With kind regards*” but it contains the adjective “vriendelijk(e)” meaning “friendly” which comes from the Dutch noun “*vriend*” (friend) and the adjective specific ending “*lijk(e)*”. To my mind a complaint suggested a conflict situation and using the word “friendly” in such a context seemed inappropriate. But as my native Dutch teacher explained to me at the time, there is nothing contradictory about it. Some websites describing ways of writing complaints mention, however, that this mode of closing a complaint should be avoided when the claimed damage or loss is grave. This personal example shows that an insufficient knowledge of the nuances of a foreign language and of foreign cultural practices could lead to misinterpretations and miscommunication.

The question is: would this difference influence the approach of a non-native Dutch speaker employee in dealing with a complaint in an outsourced activity? Would the novelty of dealing with complaints on a regular basis give a sense of urgency or a sense of detachment to the fulfilling of the task? In this case also, company regulations could compensate for differences in perspectives, by means of strict implementation of process regulations, rules and timelines. However, the impact of the difference between the employee and the customer in regard to customers’ complaints, in the context of relocated or outsourced activities must be further researched.

Given the fact that some outsourced or relocated activities are rather language-based than country-based, the cultural navigation skills of an employee working in such a position can be quite difficult to attain. For example, a service based on the French language could be offered at the same time by the same employee to customers from France, Switzerland and Belgium, countries that might differ in terms of cultural practices. Romanian employees (to keep in line with the original scenario) from such a team would therefore first have to be aware of these differences and afterwards adapt their patterns of communication

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<sup>3</sup>The presented remarks about Dutch language and culture come also from personal experience gained by completing a bachelor degree in Dutch language and literature and by numerous trips made in the past 10 years to the Netherlands for both personal and research reasons.

or behaviour to the assumed expectations of a client belonging to a specific cultural milieu. Making invisible one's own linguistic background and cultural milieu is not an easy task as such, but service workers are requested to additionally "migrate" to different linguistic and cultural contexts and act as if those were their own.

### **Who are the "invisible work-migrants"?**

In the introductory section of this article I mentioned the fact that the Dutch mass media is concerned about the many East European labour migrants who are thought to plan to come to the Netherlands. But who are the "invisible work-migrants", the non-native speakers with whom individuals from other countries come into contact with when accessing certain services? I use the phrase "invisible work-migrants" in respect to the individuals who take up the jobs that migrated from the Netherlands to Romania and who, by means of virtual communication, come into contact with the Dutch speaking population of the Netherlands and of Belgium while offering their services. They are not seen in the country(s) they offer services for, but the effect of their work is felt in numerous sectors in that same country, as shown by the diversity of job offers presented in the case study.

The jobs relocated to Romania, most of which are found within the borders of large corporations, have led to the appearance in the public's perspective of a new type of worker: the corporate worker. The people working in this relocated service delivery sector are the ones Castells calls "the networked – workers who are online but without deciding when, how, why, or with whom" (Castells, 2000: 260). But there are two categories here: the local work force and the native speakers who migrate together with the job, or afterwards for it.

The Romanian non-native Dutch speaker (our protagonist) would have had to make a previous additional effort of learning this foreign language, most of the time in the educational system, therefore leading to a higher educational level. It is obvious that the person obtaining a certain job based only on the knowledge of a foreign language would not be in direct competition with the possible native speaker equivalent. In other words, a Romanian employee would receive an outsourced job based on his knowledge of the Dutch language because he can perform that activity from Romania, where he would receive a smaller salary than his native counterpart in the Netherlands or in Belgium. If he would want to perform that activity in the Netherlands, he would be in direct competition with a native Dutch speaker, and, in addition, the employer would

be forced to pay a minimum salary at the level from Netherlands.<sup>4</sup> Moving the job from the Netherlands (where language competence is abundant, but relatively costly) to Romanian (where it is scarce, but relatively cheap) has both advantages and disadvantages for the company. The main gain seems to be hiring at a lower cost a better-educated, fluent but non-native Dutch speaker. The main risk is that language competence might be lower than required by the business, and found unsatisfactory by the native speaker end-client/customer.

Based on living costs, a native speaker would have to receive a higher salary in his home (Western) country, even if he had a lower level of education than the employee performing the same activity under its outsourced/offshore form in another (non-Western) country. A possible scenario for an organization would be therefore to convince native speakers to relocate for a time to a non-Western country in order to perform an activity based on his/her native language, leading to the so-called “expats”. Because large Romanian cities such as Bucharest, Cluj and Timișoara have become hubs of outsourced activities serving several Western countries, some of the above mentioned jobs from the advertising websites are also performed by native Dutch speakers (expats) who decided to move to Romania for a job offering. This decision can be based on an individual cost analysis, as the disposable income for expats, after paying taxes, housing and utilities, might be higher in real terms than in the Netherlands, consequently the standard of living can be better for them in Romania than in their home country.

Coming back to the Romanian work force, it must be said that there are not many statistical studies about the characteristics and attitudes of Romanian employees in general. One of these few studies is that of Bodea (2013), called “The values of Romanian employees”. The main criticism of Bodea’s study remains the choice of his 1,481 participants, as his sample is opportunistic and only representative for Romanian employees from the urban areas, who are between 20 and 50 years old, who have a university degree and who come from the three major historical areas of Romania. Still, I consider that the study of Bodea can be seen as representative for the population engaged in outsourced or relocated services, and therefore for the present article. Bodea asked his respondents to say what values are most important to them, from a given list, and then to say in what measure they consider that those values are important for the other Romanians. The study confronts the answers to the question “What are your values?” with the answers to the question “What are the values of other

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<sup>4</sup> An observation here is the fact that it should not automatically be assumed that a non-native Dutch speaker working in the service sector is always located outside the Netherlands or of Belgium or that all employees found in the Netherlands or Belgium in this sector are Dutch native speakers.

Romanians?”. The *ideal* values are the most desirable values that respondents reportedly display: honesty, confidentiality, excellence and work persistence. The most important values of *the other* Romanians are money, power and fame (Bodea, 2013). Thus, there is an obvious discrepancy between what respondents report to value themselves and what they consider that others value. The results of the study show that the self is perceived as valuing hard work and the relation with others, while the others are seen as egocentric and oriented towards self-interest (power, authority and material gain). This difference is explained by the author based on the fact that people do not feel comfortable admitting to others that power and financial gain is what drives them in life (Bodea, 2013).

A connection can be made between the results of this study and the desirability of outsourced jobs in multinational companies. These are highly desirable based on the higher wage levels compared to other smaller or state-owned companies, and also offering better working conditions in terms of office equipment and facilities. They also provide in-kind benefits such as private health-care insurance, access to private gyms, day-care for employee’s children etc. This is also why working for a multinational company can influence the chances of migration in both ways. To paraphrase Ferro (2009), it can either create the conditions for migrating [to another branch of the company found abroad] but it can also be a retention mechanism if those specific working conditions surpass the general working conditions [from Romania in this case].

### **Brains without bodies and non-places**

In the new information society “anyone with the capacity to generate exceptional added value in any market enjoys the chance to shop around the globe and to be shopped around as well” (Castells, 2000: 130). This type of outsourced activity is sometimes called “brains without bodies”, given that “the products of those brains that work at a distance arrive via the internet directly in the IT business centre from abroad, which makes up a form of virtual mobility of the work force” (Ferro, 2009: 222).

We could thus talk about the invisible migration of work: the jobs that migrate from the West towards the East. But what is the status of those working for a certain country but who do not live there, of these “brains without bodies”? Their physical presence remains invisible in the country they work for, but their actions are felt by the people living in that country, who enjoy a certain service. They are in fact a sort of a ghostly presence and I believe it would not be hazardous to say that the call centre which they are working for

presents some of the characteristics of what Marc Auge (1995) called a “non-place”. The typical examples of a non-place are hotels, train stations or airports. They are a place of anonymity, of transit and of non-time. It would be interesting to research to what extent a company with a strong organizational culture still encloses characteristics of a non-place in its call centre type departments, to see how employees in large numbers of standardized cubicles adapt their performances to the client at the other end of the line. The psychological effects of assuming this different identity during the work day should further be researched.

In regards to the perceived visibility of otherness of the ones performing some form of outsourced activity, it has been previously brought to the attention of the Dutch public that part of the low priced (clothing) goods sold in the Netherlands and manufactured in Asia was connected to the exploitative working and living conditions of the people manufacturing these goods. If the manufacturing conditions and the striking otherness of manufacturer workers remain usually out of sight, unperceived by customers, in the call centre type activities from the service sector the *otherness* of workers becomes evident, most easily through their accents. When someone contacts a call-centre or a help desk for a certain service he or she will most of the time notice if the person at the other end of the line is a native speaker or not.

In order to hide this *otherness* some companies forbid their employees to tell clients where they are placed, even when directly asked by the client during the conversation. Other companies forbid their employees by written agreement to tell anyone outside of the company what foreign (organizational) clients they offer services for. Another company forbids its employees to speak in their native language while they are sitting at their desks and lets them use only English when using the personal phone, because they could be heard by the clients their colleagues are speaking with at the same time. All these acts are a way of hiding workers’ own identity (when different from that of the client) and of putting on a face. A popular example of performing the role of “neighbouring service provider” is shown in the call centre scene from the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). Here, the main character, when confronted about his location by the client on the phone, makes efforts to convince the client of his proximity (and implicit similarity) to her. Closeness and resemblance to the clients served are a desideratum for companies outsourcing or relocating services. This is also due to the perception of the loss of jobs on the national market due to externalization of services which leads to negative reactions from the local general public regarding a service performed by an “outsider”.

The invisible workers of outsourced and relocated activities also have job-requirements such as working in shifts in order to compensate for time differences, having to give up a free holiday in their own culture as this is not

a holiday in the serviced country, living in a cultural environment during their 8 hour work day (speaking a certain language, using a certain tone etc.) and entering a (very) different milieu outside of the working hours.

## **Conclusions**

The new information technology has redefined work processes, workers and the occupational structure of different societies (Castells, 2000) and multinational companies are often seen as the motor of the globalization process. The full impact of jobs migration to Romania, as part of this trend, has not yet been thoroughly researched. At the present moment the demand for Dutch speakers is greater than the offer (the actual number of people who speak Dutch). Higher wages are offered for competences hard to come by (such as the knowledge of the Dutch language now is). A Dutch language fresh graduate can very easily find a job, with a salary higher than the average entry positions. The combination of technical competences and foreign languages (other than English or French) could also be highly desirable.

While jobs migrating from the West towards the East are typically in the service sector, most of Romanian labour migrants in the West take up jobs in agriculture, caring-services and constructions, which are place-bound jobs. Thus, even if the migration of jobs for the service sector continues, it might have little impact on diminishing the out-migration of labourers, because they most probably lack the skills required to perform the outsourced jobs.

Looking at a micro level and on the short term, the experience of working for a transnational corporation could make for an attractive CV and a desirable future employee for other companies. However, on a larger scale and on the long run, in case that (many of) the large corporations that employ this highly-skilled workforce decide to leave Romania, the remaining pool of qualified unemployed individuals would be too large to be possibly absorbed by the remaining job market.

The high competitiveness of the global job market puts high pressures on individuals to constantly keep improving their skills range and “employability”. Taking things even further in this respect, Bloom (2013) speaks about the discourse encouraging the continuous individual strive for remaining or becoming fully employable in terms of self-exploitation. This paper explored these processes in the case of “brains without bodies” working in the “non-places” of service-sector companies and serving Dutch clients and customers. It showed that, in addition to technical and foreign language skills, workers from the outsourced or relocated services sector are also encouraged to develop a

range of soft skills, such as cultural navigation and adaptation of identity to the customer whom they are interacting with at a certain moment. The manifold implications for the persons working in this sector, including psychological aspects, should therefore be further researched.

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## FROM INFORMAL EXCHANGES TO DUAL PRACTICES. THE SHADOWS OF THE ROMANIAN HEALTH CARE REFORM

CRISTINE PALAGA<sup>1</sup>

**Motto:**

*Twenty years have passed and we're even more unstable than before.  
(D.N., senior surgeon)*

*Many forms of human suffering and many deficits in human flourishing  
are the result of existing institutions and social structures. (E.O. Wright,  
2012:1)*

**Abstract.** The current frailties of the Romanian health care system are often explained by resorting to the previous regime's institutional framework, rarely accepting that they are also the product of post-1990 reforms and the neoliberal means of system reconfiguration. This paper provides an ethnographic account of the ways in which two "products" of these reforms actively contribute to the augmentation of private medical services and to the diminishing access to quality care in the public system: the bureaucratization of primary medicine and the "dual medical practice". More specifically, I use the concept of "informal exchanges" in order to explore the variety of transactions that occur between patients and the health care staff and to document the means through which its main social actors understand, reproduce, legitimize or blame the very existence of these practices. Then, I analyze how referrals to private medical units increasingly replace informal payments, simultaneously laying even harder obstacles in the access to health care for those in need.

**Keywords:** informal payments, postsocialist health care reform, dual medical practice, private health care, medical anthropology

**Introduction:  
brief incursion into the theory of informal exchanges**

Informal rewards for health-care services consist of payments, in money or in kind, that patients offer for services performed within the public health care system, which should be either free or significantly subsidized for

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insured persons. Although hardly admitted in formal conversations, they are either expected or directly demanded by the healthcare providers (Ensor and Savelyeva, 1998:41).

In order to designate these payments, several labels have been used: “illicit payments”, “under-the-table-payments”, “unofficial donations”, “small tokens of appreciation” etc. Mainstream reports on the health care services (such as those of the World Health Organization – WHO or the European Commission – Eurostat) prefer to use the term “informal payments”, due to its neutral charge. In the present paper, I have opted to use the concept of “informal exchanges” in order to explore the variety of forms of economic and symbolic transactions that occur between patients and the health care staff (nurses, doctors and other care providers) and to document the means through which the main social actors who take part in informal medical exchanges understand, reproduce, legitimize or blame the very existence of these practices.

Although extremely useful in understanding the phenomenon of the medical informal economy, macrostructural explanations cannot entirely exhaust the internal mechanisms of producing and reproducing informal exchanges. The object of these practices is by itself uncertain, possessing ambivalent qualities, sometimes paradigmatic for “commodities” otherwise pertaining to the anthropological category of “gift” (Stan, 2012). In order to capture “the ambiguous ways through which the formal and informal, the official and unofficial, the visible and invisible, the compliant and the in-compliant” are produced (Koycheva, 2013: 4), a bottom-up analysis is required, beginning with the specificities of the medical act and what the narrative of the disease entails, going through probing the world of sensibilities and individual explanations for these informal practices and building up towards revealing the systemic outlets that underlie these practices. This study focuses on the latter aspect, aiming to point out the multiple ways in which two products of the liberal health reform allow for the proliferation and diversification of informal medical economy.

My ethnographic account, located in public hospitals from one of the largest Romanian university-centres, connects to a broader literature on the forms, frequency and relevance of these exchanges, particularly in those countries where the public health care system suffers from scarce financing and inefficient management. During the last three years, I had access to the field of daily interactions between patients and health care staff as a college student in Nursing, a status that allowed me to assist to various types of medical activities, to gain insights into their medical and social meanings, while being perceived by both patients and hospital staff as “an insider” and “an outsider” at the same time. Oscillating between the anthropological curiosity

and the internalization of medical conduct, my research takes thus the form of a hybrid between the emic and the ethic perspectives. In order to obtain a grassroots view on the functioning of informal economy in medical care, I combined participant observation with semi-structured in-depth interviews. Seven public hospital departments became my main research sites; their ethnographies were supplemented with extensive conversations about the experiences of my subjects in other public or private clinics in which they were treated. In this way, I was able to re-construct their trajectories through different medical units and portray, from their view, the encounters and exchanges that took place with medical staff. The final textual form of field experiences is not void of “theory”, as it assembles data so as to enlarge our understanding of informal exchanges and dual practices in the health care sector. But the ways in which the subjects themselves understand and confer meaning to the institutional context, which they are part of, remains an inseparable part of this explanation. Consequently, I have tried to shed light as faithfully as possible on their lived experiences and interpretations.

Specialized studies on the proportion and implications of informal payments for medical services made their debut in the early 1990s, when the interest of researchers focused mainly on analysing the means through which health systems throughout ex-communist Central and Eastern European states adapt to the new demands of democratic societies (Stepurko et.al., 2010), asking for better quality services and social fairness.

Indeed, in the “global South”, the salience and amplitude of informal exchanges between the patient and the medical team can be deduced from the plurality of examples given by specific research covering vast geographic spaces. There has been an increased incidence of informal medical economy reported throughout all Central and Eastern European states (Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Russia, Poland, Romania etc.), and in `third-world countries` such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; Uganda, Mozambique, Rwanda, Ethiopia; Bolivia; Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Cherecheş et. al., 2013). However, there is a scarcity of studies on informal payments in the health care systems of high-income countries from Northern and Western Europe, North America or Australia, based on the assumption that the phenomena does not occur there (Cherecheş et. al., 2013). Some go even further and consider that informal payments constitute a relevant marker by which the degree of liberalization and democratization of economy can be measured. Yet, other studies provide evidence that forms of informal exchanges occur in “advanced” health-care systems as well. For example, the French perform informal payments in the field of surgery (Bellanger, 2000), while in Italy, medical licenses were suspended for a group of general practitioners as a result of an onerous contract with a private radiology

centre, by which the doctors promised to deliver patients from the public healthcare sector to the private one (Turone, 1998 *apud*. Ferrinho et.al., 2004). Consequently, I suspect that the absence of documentation on such cases of informal exchange in the “global North” is rather the result of a policy of silence, an act of opacity and by no means solid proof of a high level of regulation and transparency at which the informal medical economy simply ceases to exist.

While the scientific community managed to standardize the term meant to nominate informal exchanges, the attempt to make an inventory of definitions on the phenomenon shows the fact that there is no unique, coherent or unanimously accepted manner of circumscribing the content and sphere of informal payments. Two distinct directions of categorizing the phenomenon can be established: a first line of thought that equates informal payments with acts of corruption and a second one, that distances itself from the legal status of these practices, instead concentrating on the method by which the protagonists of the exchange either legitimize or blame the system of informal payments (which nonetheless they both admit to exist and actively reproduce). Therefore, these are treated either as deviations from the legal payment system (Szendé and Culyer, 2006 *apud*. Cherecheş et al., 2013: 110), being unavoidably bound to corruption (Liaropoulos et al., 2008), or as acts that can only be understood by registering and comparing the motivations beneath the reproduction of such practices by social practices.

### **The Romanian Health Care System Reform**

Numerous studies regarding informal payments in the Romanian medical system concentrated thoroughly on delivering a critique of the phenomenon from a legalist perspective, being abruptly catalogued and dealt with as acts of corruption. It is assumed that under-the-table payments constitute a legacy of the communist past, when the quality of public services was so poor that individuals needed to “buy” private privileges that medical staff was able to preferentially channel from the public pool. The problem with this ways of establishing the genesis and causes of the informal medical economy is the disregard of the more recent structural arrangements which contribute to the reproduction of these practices. Without neglecting the genealogy of informal payments in the health care system and the fact that they were indeed performed during the socialist epoch as well, I try to analyse how the post-socialist institutional frames influence the reality of the informal economy of medical and health-care services. In line with Stan (2012), I posit that medical informal payments constitute individual responses to the “increased inequalities that followed the post-socialist redesign of the state” (Stan, 2012:65).

As the state withdrew more and more from both economy and society, the post-socialist health reform projects, centred on encouraging private initiative and limiting patient access to the secondary and tertiary health care sectors, generated new forms of inequality and power asymmetries, fuelling individual strategies of informally procuring and providing better medical care. Post-socialist informal economic relations are theorized as temporary results of a transition from a rough bureaucratic state to a transparent and competitive economy (Kornai, 2000; Radin, 2009 *apud*. Stan, 2012). Therefore, informal exchanges are presented as relics of the communist past (to become extinct once the economy becomes fully liberal), instead of being asserted as direct repercussions of current economic and political transformations.

In the above-described framework, the internal causes of this phenomenon are blown out of proportion while the external ones are minimized, thus preventing any discussions on the negative effects of the globalization of capitalism (Kaminska, 2014). Therefore, we need to bring into attention the wider political and economic context in which these informal exchange relations are produced. Major imbalance was driven by budget cuts, the decentralization process, public-private partnerships and outsourcing in the health system, as well as by the emphasis on primary medicine along with the underfinancing of this field (Popescu, 2009). Consequently, I argue that we should focus on how the results of the health reform itself have maintained and augmented the medical informal economy rather than place the blame fully on the communist past.

Once we stop resorting to the anti-communist discourse for explaining all the social shortcomings and imbalances, we will be able to identify how certain structural factors yielding from the transition to capitalism and an insurance-based health care system (as opposed to the “communist” one) lead to propagating the negative aspects of medical informal exchanges (Stan, 2012).

The political, economic and social permutations that marked the last decade of the twentieth century heralded an indispensable set of reforms meant to stabilize Romanian society and situate it in the immediate proximity of a democratic organization. The reformist enthusiasm would strongly infiltrate the healthcare system; the necessity for restructuring finance flows and the means of organization of the entire Romanian health care system from the beginning of the 1990s was synthesized in the assertion: the “state as the poorest manager”. The socialist system had guaranteed universal access to healthcare for the entire population through services provided within state-owned and state-administered dispensaries and hospitals. This universalist desideratum was later denounced as tributary to a deficient and oversized infrastructure that was incompetently managed, thus inevitably headed for bad quality services and bankruptcy.

After the fall of communism, the primary objective of the health reform was to reduce the budget load that was allocated to the health system. This was done mainly through introducing quasi-market elements, meant to stimulate real market conditions (ORS, 2012). Budget cuts and the new free-market imagery should both be understood as acts of state inactivity and responsibility transfer. While the post-socialist health reform initially concentrated on introducing market mechanisms (meant to optimize the management of clinical cases with minimal expenses), it later grew to openly support private initiative in the health care “business” (Stan, 2012). The state stimulated private medical practice, it supported the development of private clinics and medical laboratories and, last but not least, it encouraged people to contract private health insurance alongside the (still compulsory) public insurance (IER, 2002). Resources destined to the public health system were drastically cut as the state invested substantial sums of money into the development of a secondary, private health infrastructure (Stan, 2012). Part of the National Health Insurance House funds (between 5% and 17%) were oriented towards private hospital units, thus crippling the already limited budget for public hospitals. In 2006, there were 12 private hospitals in Romania; this number grew to 865 by 2012 (SAR, 2013:52). One can observe how, under state oversight, private clinics succeeded in tapping into the health insurance system, thus becoming profitable businesses. Without state support, this adjacent system of medical service would not have been sustainable due to the fact that “resorting to private services as an alternative to the public system is expensive even for those who earn average wages” (Doboş, 2006:5).

The apogee of liberalization measures for the healthcare system was reached in 2011, as the Government recommended the individual privatization of most public clinics; only teaching hospitals would remain state-bound. Also, some politicians openly spoke about the initiative to completely drop the national health insurance, and substitute it with private forms of insurance. After street protests and a long public debate, the initiative was abandoned. Then President Traian Băsescu demanded the withdrawal of the project, while ironically stating: “I see that a lot of people are satisfied with the current health system”<sup>2</sup>. Even today, as an image of symmetry, the preferential topic of discussion in the field of health reform is constituted by the necessity to privatize (partially or completely) the health system.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/ministrul-sanatatii-a-retras-din-dezbatere-proiectul-legii-sanatatii-dupa-ce-basescu-a-cerut-public-acest-lucru-9146050>  
[last accessed: 10.05.2015].

## **The bureaucratization of primary medicine and the augmentation of private medical services**

Since 1994, one of the most hardened common denominators of all reformist initiatives has been the obsession for developing a type of primary medical assistance different than the one promoted within the Semashko model (simply put, the communist version of the Beveridgean model). The most important reform aimed at reducing the number of unnecessary hospital cases, due to the fact that many patients would access the tertiary health sector without actually requiring hospitalization in order to regain their health. Unnecessary hospitalizations had become a vacuum for funds throughout the entire system. Therefore, the main purpose of the strategies designed to control these unjustified entries in the hospital system was the consolidation of primary medical assistance (Rebeleanu et al., 2013:68). The general practitioner (also known as “family doctor”) becomes the health reform hero, being the assignee of the role of the “gatekeeper”, filtering all entries into the secondary and tertiary health sectors.

In the early post-socialist period, the governmental decision-makers imagined an alternative of providing primary medical services by overhauling the role of the family doctor. Therefore, the dispensaries that depended both financially and administratively on hospitals were turned into autonomous medical cabinets, in which the insured patient can benefit from prophylactic medical services (implementing vaccination schemes, sanitary education) as well as primary services (taking record of chronic patients, treating various minor pathologies and mediating between the patient and specialized medical practitioners). Despite the declared interest towards building a primary medical infrastructure, this domain was financially neglected by the government’s policy-makers and the burden of healthcare costs shifted to the patients as co-payments or informal payments in the public system, or as out-of-pockets expenditures in the private system (Popescu, Raț and Rebeleanu, 2008).

It is important to take note that family doctors/general practitioners are not state employees, but independent suppliers contracted by the National Health Insurance House, being mainly paid per number of insured patients registered on their list. This method of payment is called “capitation”<sup>3</sup>.

The scarcity of financial resources, the large number of patients per general practitioner, the increasing bureaucratization of their relations with the National Health Insurance House, as well as other medical institutions, led

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.independentonline.ro/2015/02/13/Medicina-de-familie--cu-ziua--11173>  
[last accessed: 10.05.2015].

to the failure of this new imaginary of primary healthcare services. The general practitioner cannot manage to promptly filter entries in the secondary and tertiary health sectors, whereas hospital treatment still demands most of the health care system's resources. In fact, the perverse effect of inefficient reforms throughout the field of primary medical care is not the decrease of patient access towards more specialized (and more costly) medical services, but instead the limited access to the most basic sector of the healthcare system (Vlădescu et al., 2002). There is no surprise that access to primary medical care has diminished and that hospital treatment remained ever-increasing on the background of severe underfunding of the main level of healthcare and lack of precise control over hospital admissions.

Therefore, the same reform that was meant to substantially reduce the number of patients who address the secondary and tertiary healthcare levels, actually transformed the general practitioner into an irritable bureaucrat, "who does anything but medicine" (S, age 32, male)<sup>4</sup>.

Endless lists of patients, restricted budgets, limited numbers of daily consults, restrictions on recipe numbers and papers that vouch for necessity of specialist expertise as well as delayed expert examinations based on these vouchers constitute just a few of the reasons why patients choose not to consult the general practitioner:

Screw them all! (...) I went for a consult because of a rash and she [the general practitioner] told me that she could not give me a compensated prescription, that the share for the day was over (I, age 27, male).

This amount of demotivating factors in consulting the general practitioner has done nothing else than to create power differentials between doctors and to precipitate the reality of informal exchanges: the general practitioner lost his or her medical prowess in the eyes of the patient. They are no longer deemed capable of establishing accurate diagnostics or a proper treatment plan: "he tells you off the top of his head that you have this or that, maybe he gets it right, maybe not, it's like Bingo!" (U, age 43, male); "my doctor only prescribes me antibiotics, regardless of what I could have (S, age 22, female).

The general practitioner is reduced to a managerial instance, as he or she is condemned to abide by the exaggerate formalities of the system. The actions of the general practitioner focus mainly on optimally accounting for medical cases, thus radically distancing oneself from their professional preparation up to

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<sup>4</sup> Arbitrarily, the letters of the alphabet will substitute the name of the research subjects, in order to protect their identities. The purpose of these fictive nominations is to differentiate between various voices and interventions.

that point where they start professing “anything but the job you trained for all these hard years” (dr. G., general practitioner, age 51, female). Along the major stress caused by ever-increasing number of audits done by National Health Insurance House, which...

... catches any and all irregularities. Just this month I’ve had to pay from my own pocket ‘cause they said the paperwork wasn’t done right” (dr. G., general practitioner, age 51, female).

the general practitioner needs to manage all “disgruntled patients”:

I do everything I can for them! There’s no way I could do more! But they don’t understand me, they think I’m the root of all evils! (dr. G., general practitioner, age 51, female).

Most systemic imbalances transpire during consults with general practitioners; thus, all incisive reactions become visible in his or her presence.

The intensive bureaucratization of the general practitioner’s profession severely damages the therapeutic nature of doctor-patient relationship. Discussions with general practitioners most often deviate from topics such as clinical symptoms or diseased-induced anxiety, into the realm of negotiating...

... what your compensated prescriptions are, what drugs you should buy, when to return for a ticket to a specialist” (S, 60, female).

Also, the reform of the primary medical system places the general practitioner on an intra-professional inferior position, an attitude that is reproduced among other medical practitioners:

A bunch of clerks. They’re not even good clerks (dr. Z., male, surgeon, age 52).

People show up with some diagnostic ideas from the general practitioner that you can’t believe your ears! (dr. M., male, otorhinolaryngologist, age35).

We should take into account the fact that patients are in a state of competition for resources, each of them vying for timely appointments, in order to complete those paraclinic examinations needed in order to establish an accurate diagnoses or in order to get compensated medical treatment. Thus, we can distinguish between two categories of patients: the first category of those that resort to “small tokens of attention” to lubricate their relationship with the general practitioner and the second category of patients, comprised of those people who avoid the general practitioner’s filter and who would rather address specialists directly, either in their private offices or in gigantic queues during their schedules in public clinics, knowing that “if you’re willing to spend, there’s nothing you can’t fix” (R, age 39, female).

**Dual medical practice. Coercion versus voluntarism in the passage from informal exchanges in the public system to the formal purchasing of medical services**

In order to correct the underpayment from the public healthcare system, more and more medical practitioners resort to the so-called “dual medical practice”. The term is used to describe the particular situation in which medicine is practiced in multiple sites, both public and private (Ferrinho et al., 2004). Dual medical practice designates the particular situation of those medical practitioners that simultaneously operate in public medical settings as well as in private medical establishments.

The private-public overlap in the health system reflects the “system’s inability to ensure adequate salaries and working conditions” (Ferrinho et al., 2004:1). The dual medical practice has a compensatory effect, since doctors are constrained to round up the pay checks they obtain through practice in the public healthcare system by providing services in the private sector as well.

In the public healthcare sector, medical personnel of superior, medium and auxiliary status are paid with set specified wages, perceived as being unjustly low rewards for the preparation and work that are demanded of them. It is estimated that the largest share of medical practitioners’ revenues originates from informal payments made by patients (IER, 2002: 54). The sums in question can double or even triple the official income of the medical employee (Ensor, 1998; Baschchieri et al., 2006).

Medics and nurses working in the public health sector are often labelled as unmotivated, unproductive, inefficient, and corrupt (Stepurko et al., 2010). These unfavourable labels are due to coping strategies through which the medical team is presumed to attempt to remedy their financial woes as well as the improper workplace conditions by demanding extra payments directly from patients. Because of several virulent anticorruption campaigns aimed at medical practitioners (Stan, 2012), these explicit demands became less frequent. Nonetheless, in parallel, several doctors started to use their own private practices as fronts that enable them to safely obtain extra-income without fear of legal repercussions. Dual medical practice triggers power-relations that lead to exclusion and layering; patients confronted with severe medical conditions, but who lack the resources needed in order to obtain private medical care, are often delayed or denied access to higher-grade medical specialists from the public medical sphere because of the fact that the schedules of said experts are oversaturated by cases addressed to their private practice.

Due to the fact that dual medical practice allows the exploitation of the institutionalized health access circuit, embedding the possibility of instilling a “predatory behaviour” throughout the medical ranks (Lambertini, 1999 *apud*.

Ferrinho et al., 2004; Stan, 2012), numerous patients addressing public healthcare services are redirected to private clinics for “more thorough examinations” (A, age 43, male).

The legal tagging of informal payments in the medical system as acts of bribery, seconded by ample negative media campaigns aimed at condemning them have led to the apparition of nuances in the methods through which some physicians act compellingly against the patient’s interest for personal gain. Through dual medical practice, the explicit initiation of informal relations is replaced by referrals towards private health clinics, in which the physician is either a practitioner or a shareholder. Therefore, patients pay extra for consults or procedures that are included in their insurance policy and could have just as well been performed in the public system. The act of constraining a patient to address private medical settings while being entitled to the same services in the public medical healthcare system constitutes a replacement of informal exchanges that is “risk-free”; moreover, this kind of constraint is hidden behind the false “choice” of using “shiny and friendly” private services.

The leniency of government authorities regarding the double employment of medical personnel in both public and private healthcare spheres generates a conflict of interest that causes patients/potential patients to be severely disadvantaged when claiming their rights as insured persons in the public system. As a pattern, most public employees provide similar services in private medical facilities, which allow them to treat patients that address the public sector, based on their public health insurance contract (Popescu, 2009). In this manner, a stream of patients between the public and private sector is created, flowing in both directions, according to the patient’s or the doctor’s strategic interests, thus eluding the filter role assigned to the general practitioner and saturating the tertiary health sector.

In the following paragraphs I will try to identify other consequences of this overlap between the private and public health sectors, mainly focusing on the repercussions that this specific institutional arrangement has at the individual level of the patient and the medical staff.

Both public and private systems are in fierce competition to attract as much as possible of the physician’s working time. In Romania, a physician has 15 minutes allocated per each new patient in a hospital unit, while, in the private medical system the patient can take up as much of the physician’s time as he or she is willing or able to pay for. In Cluj-Napoca, there are niches in the private healthcare system as well, where the time for a medical consult is strictly regulated (Oncological private medical cabinets, for example) – 15 minutes/per consult/per patient, but the patient as a paying customer has the possibility to pay extra in order to increase session time with the doctor. Due

to the demand for prolonging the time allocated to a medical consult, the patient is indirectly encouraged to address the same doctor in his/her private cabinet:

When somebody's ill, they need the doctor to explain every detail to them using a rudimentary language. The doctor should speak gently and clearly. In fifteen minutes, for as long as the consult lasts, the doctor himself can't know for sure what disease he's dealing with. Of course you're gonna go see him in private, when he's got more time for you (L., licensed nurse).

Furthermore, the physician's dual professional practice represents a fundamental criterion by which patients guide their options when they resort to the private healthcare services. There are multiple arguments that justify this choice; first of all, a doctor that also performs public service should have greater professional expertise compared to one who is only employed in the private sector. Secondly, in this way they save the time and effort needed to pass through the public system:

I'd rather pay up straight to the privates than get an appointment with my general practitioner, who'll send me to clinics and infernal queues. This way, the doctor will treat me straight in the hospital; of course, I still need to go back for an occasional check-up at the private clinic from time to time, you know what I'm saying? (C, age 47, male).

Therefore, by going straight to the private sector, the patient manages to shunt the bureaucratic structure of the primary medical sector, thus gaining time that often proves to be invaluable, especially when dealing with a chronic or life-threatening medical condition.

Private medical services developed on the background of an acutely insufficient logistic capacity, characteristic to the state clinic circuit:

I've waited for an entire month to get an MRI, had some problems with those guys at the Insurance House (National Health Insurance House, n.n.), those lousy incompetents! (...) if I had the money to get it done in a private clinic, to avoid wasting time on the road and on hospital corridors, I wouldn't have given it a second thought! (F, age 25, female).

Dual medical practice is also perceived by patients as a chance to be treated by renowned doctors, experts whose professional success recommend them:

You know, one day you are completely healthy, you don't get a shot in your life and then, all of the sudden, they need to chop off your leg in order to keep you alive! (...) it is normal to want the best doctor to be the one who takes care of you and for that you must be ready to pay a shitload of money... (A, age 43, male).

The vulnerability of the medical system toward the reality of informal exchanges needs to be justified through the perspective of the deep state of uncertainty that accompanies the immediate need for medical treatment (Savedoff, 2006). One of the purposes of these informal practices is to reduce the uncertainty generated by disease and to soften the medical gaze.

Neoliberal health reforms aimed at transforming the beneficiary of the public health care system into a “client” of medical services, as an elongation of the idea that he would consume the health offer in the same manner by which he consumes other goods or services (Haug and Levin, 1983 *apud* Henderson and Petersen, 2002). But this “health consumer construct” disregards the fact that “the individual continues to think and to act in a manner consonant with traditional models of patienthood” (Irvine, 2002:31). When confronted with the spectre of disease, individuals tend to act irrationally, abandoning themselves to physicians’ judgements regarding medical procedures or treatment plan. However, unwilling to entirely release control, the patient “finds the motivation to pay extra even for the slightest improvement in the quality of health care”<sup>5</sup>.

The increasing number of private medical consults also represents the expression of a patient riot against the flawed manners of doctors professing in state clinics and hospital units. Suggestive in this regard is the statement of a patient (Z, age 24, female), who saw the same gynaecologist after a certain timeframe, both in the public medical system and in his private office. While the private visit felt acceptable – “(...) he spoke nicely to me, he asked about my sexual history, he was kind and careful”, the public emergency consult revealed an entirely different type of professional conduit:

Seriously, he almost started swearing at me. I told him that my ovaries hurt and he rushed me, told me to stop stating an opinion because surely I can’t know enough anatomy. Then he told me to get undressed and, I swear, that was the most painful medical exam in my entire life (...) He prescribed some pain meds then sent me home. I was on the brink of telling him: *You know how to behave in a private consult, don’t you, you son of a bitch?* (Z, age 24, female).

Another female patient, confronted with an uncannily similar case, concluded:

I think this is their money-making strategy. They act like shit, so that you get scared and then you go see them in private, ’cause you know they’ll treat you right. But many women stop going altogether, since they have no money. And then you wonder why they are so many cases of cancer and other diseases among women (Al., age 36, female).

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.criticatac.ro/10640/sondajul-asiguratului-pierdut-despre-marketizarea-sanatatii/> [Accessed: 10.05.2015].

Predatory behaviour in clinical personnel (Lambertini, 1999 apud. Ferrinho et. al., 2004; Stan, 2012) constitutes a financial obstacle in accessing healthcare services and the long term effect of this manner of exercising the medical profession is that of delegitimizing the public health system (Ferrinho et. al., 2002; Doboş, 2005).

Private medical institutions have signed contracts with the National Health Insurance House, thus having the possibility to redirect patients towards the public hospital environment and to perform treatment inside the public sector (Popescu, 2009). Remaining in the field of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, a niche that is amply exploited by some doctors is providing prenatal care in the private medical environment while assisting birth or performing a caesarean operation in public hospitals:

All throughout my pregnancy, I used see him in his private office. He told me that he couldn't be reached at the [public] hospital, that he was too busy, that he didn't have time for consults there. I used to see him once a month; each consult was 150 lei [approximately 40 US dollars - n.n.] (...) I won't deny it, he was really nice to me. (...) He asked me where I wanted to give birth, in a private clinic or in the public hospital; I told him I wanted to do it at the hospital, cause I didn't have money to go to the private clinic. He said there was no problem, that we would do the C-section at the hospital. You see, I didn't want to do it naturally, I was afraid of the pain. (...) I gave birth assisted by the midwife, he only came to see me once. For his short visit I gave him an extra 1000 lei [approximately 250 US dollars - n.n.] (M, age 32, female).

It is important to note that the private medical health market cannot provide a wide variety of services. The tendency is towards "selecting those niches that provide the most demand", not towards ensuring a full range of healthcare services (Macq et al. 2000). Those doctors who use the public-private circuits in their personal interest, "bringing their clientele to the public hospital from the private medical centre" turn into "simple advertisers for their own offices, where they talk smoothly and do tests"<sup>6</sup>.

Relevant to this argument is the case of a patient who presents himself in a public hospital with a ticket from his general practitioner, in order to do a pulmonary X-ray:

I get scheduled on time (...), I do the scan and there I am, in front of the doctor, so he can check it out. He didn't really look at the film too much; he looked at me more, must have thought I had money judging by the way I was dressed. He then told me to look him up at his private office later in the afternoon, for

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.criticatac.ro/20775/vrem-sntate-bun-pentru-puini-sau-ceva-sntate-pentru-toi-respect-pentru-comunistul-arafat/> [Last accessed: 10.05.2015].

diagnoses and treatment. Pulled up a business card and told me to be there after 2 P.M. I did exactly as he said, what was I supposed to do? Pick a fight? Went to his office and paid 50 lei [approximately 12 US dollars - n.n.]. Good thing I didn't have to spend more! (Ct, age 50, male).

In order to get an overview on the ways in which different doctors allow and initiate the conflicting interference between the public and the private healthcare systems, I find that the following two paradigmatic situations are highly relevant.

The first example is that of a patient admitted for a surgical intervention in order to have a breast nodule removed. After a two day wait, the patient was directed to a certain private clinic, without being previously discharged from the hospital. When I talked to her during my nursing rounds, I found her crying and extremely agitated due to the fact that she had to borrow money in order to pay for a biopsy performed in a private centre, at the doctor's wish. Furthermore, the same medic had suggested that she have an MRI in the same private medical unit, for which she would have to pay another 750 Ron (approximately 170 US dollars). I was asked if those tests could also be performed inside the state hospital. Visibly puzzled, I told her it was possible, but that they require time and numerous papers that had to be emitted by various institutions. Feeling exhausted and powerless, the patient kept repeating: "I think it would be better if I just went home! (...) I already told the doctor that I can't pay for all this!" (XY, age 27, female). The next day, another patient held the same hospital room; I don't know if the operation took place or if the previous patient had been discharged on request.

Dual medical practice allows the doctor to recommend expensive paraclinic procedures, towards the purpose of rounding up his/her monthly income, instead of doing so for diagnostic reason. Some of the doctor's indications do not always have a medical justification, since sometimes there are less expensive methods to determine a diagnosis (Popescu, 2009). Just to be clear, this was not the case of the aforementioned patient, who needed those tests and whose contact with the perversities of the health system could very well cost her life. The dual medical practice allows the doctor to become *homo economicus*, strategically structuring his or her relationship with the patient with the (secondary) purpose of augmenting his income, without taking the physical and mental well-being of the patient into consideration.

The second paradigmatic example that documents the way in which the private health sector damages the interests of a patient already integrated in the public system follows a similar scenario. The patient showed up at the E.R., where...

I waited for two whole hours, without exaggeration. Nobody gave a damn about me (...) Anyway, someone finally shows up and takes me to a bed so I can lie down. I was in some serious pain! I kept twitching around, had no idea what was happening. They finally gave me some painkillers (...), gave me an ultrasound, saw that I had kidney stones and they me to another clinical department (...) So let the fun begin! I wait for a while and a kind doctor shows up. He told me I needed surgery... (P, age 24, female).

After mentioning the necessity of a surgical procedure, the doctor designated his resident to give more details to the patients.

See if she can afford it and then come tell me, I heard him say to the resident. I was already starting to panic (P, age 24, female).

The medical resident was therefore tasked with detailing the conditions for the patient to regain her health:

He told me that I had to go to a private clinic, said that it wasn't a complicated procedure, but that general anaesthesia was needed and that it would cost 300 Euros (P, age 24, female).

The patient was never presented with the possibility of having the same procedure performed in a public hospital. Despite her initial hesitation, she finally accepted to have the surgery performed in the private clinic; intense pain, added to the fear of what might happen if the surgery was postponed were the main determining factors for accepting the terms set by the doctor through his resident. The check-ups that followed after the surgery were performed in a public hospital. "I never had to wait in line, was always the first to get to the doctor", remembers P. Shortly after the intervention, she needed to undergo another procedure. I had the chance to accompany her to the hospital. She was anxious about the fact that the doctor might ask for more money:

Seriously! [laughing, n.n.] If he wants more money, I'll just keep this tube inside me, cause I have nothing more to give! (P, age 24, female).

She addressed the receptionist, mentioning that she was scheduled for a minor intervention. Following standard procedure, the nurse requested the necessary documents for undergoing surgery in the public health sector: a medical letter, signed by the general practitioner, a receipt attesting that she was medically insured and, finally, a check in ticket from a specialist clinician. P could not produce any of the documents listed above:

I froze when she asked me for those papers. I had never been in a hospital before and I didn't know that I needed letters or receipts, also the doctor never mentioned any of those (P, age 24, female).

Thinking that she might need to reschedule the intervention, the patient waited for the doctor; when he finally arrived, the medic got angry at the nurse for making "miss p wait for so long". "She doesn't need anything (any of the above-mentioned documents, n.n.). Have her ready and prep the room", were the doctor's orders. Feeling quite bad for the entire situation, p apologized to the nurse, telling her she would bring all the necessary papers in the future, a moment in which the nurse reacted by saying: "the doctor is a grown-up! He knows what to do so he doesn't get into trouble!" (N, nurse).

Within the timeframe that elapsed between the moment in which the patient was taken into the O.R. and the time they brought her back in the ambulatory, I witnessed a heated discussion about a patient who was also "advised" to have surgery in a private clinic. The patient in question explained to his entourage, on a high tone, that the nerve and lack of work ethic of Romanian medical practitioners had reached unprecedented heights. For a short period of time, the waiting room turned into a space in which the patient openly denounced the abuse to which he was subjected:

What's happening here is absurd. So it's normal for them to say that I can only have the operation at a private clinic? What's wrong with the hospital, sir?! He tells me that aaaalll beds are occupied and I need to wait until one frees up, but there's no such problem at the private clinic, where it can be handled i-mme-diate-ly [he emphasizes the word - n.n.]. It's clear that they can't squeeze enough money from the sick people in hospital (...) A bunch of crooks and rascals! (V, male, approx. 40 years old)

Promptly, a nurse intervenes in order to calm the spirits - other patients were stirred by the man's speech, jumping in to the conversation:

Where do you think you are? This is a hospital and not the circus! You don't yell around here, 'cause there are sick people around. (...) also why didn't you get shoes? [when entering the medical unit, patients and visitors are obliged to wear some protective plastic material on top of their shoes - n.n.]. Do you want to bring germs from outside, so that ill people can get worse?! (K, female, approx. 30 years old)

The symbolic pollution that this patient created by daring to signal out a flagrant violation of his fundamental right to access quality public medical healthcare was transformed into an inconsistent speech on the means by which the patient interrupts the working flow of the unit. The nurse's recourse

to regimentation, to asepsis-antisepsis norms and the high degree of organization that constitute the functioning model of any hospital unit could do nothing else but deepen the discordance between the pretended state of things, which was supported by the medical staff and the reality experienced by the patient.

### **From patients to clients. (Not so) final thoughts on the subject matter**

Using ethnographic details to illustrate how abstract, macrosocial instances outline the lives of particular individuals, I strove to point out, throughout this paper, how the perseverance of healthcare reform initiatives in the direction of developing the field of primary medicine and of aligning the medical system to liberal market expectations generated new forms of informal payments, diversifying and deepening patients' uncertainty.

As the state withdrew more and more from both economy and society, the project of post-socialist health care reform, centred on encouraging private initiative and limiting patient access to the secondary and tertiary healthcare sectors, generated new forms of inequality and power asymmetries, fuelling those individual strategies that informally procure/provide better medical care. The general practitioner is reduced to a managerial instance, as he or she is condemned to abide by the exaggerate formalities of the system. Endless lists of patients, restricted budgets, limited numbers of daily consults, restrictions on recipe numbers and papers that vouch for necessity of specialist expertise as well as delayed expert examinations based on these vouchers constitute just a few of the reasons why patients choose not to consult the general practitioner anymore. This amount of demotivating factors has done nothing else than to create intra-professional power differentials between doctors and to precipitate the reality of informal exchanges. Thus, we can distinguish between two categories of patients: the first category are those who resort to "small tokens of attention" to lubricate their relationship with the general practitioner, while the second category is comprised of those who avoid the general practitioner's filter and who would rather address specialists directly, either in their private offices or in gigantic queues during their schedules in public clinics, knowing that "if you're willing to spend, there's nothing you can't fix" (R, age 39, female).

Also, the simultaneity of medical practice in public and private segments has two immediate effects. On the one hand, it minimizes the filter role of general practitioners, who become incapacitated in their medical role and deprived of real decision-making power over who should and who shouldn't receive specialized medical consultation and treatment, based on their health status. On the other hand, it deepens social asymmetries regarding access to

the secondary and tertiary healthcare sectors: some patients can afford paying for services and they consequently have access to treatments that are not necessary considering their health status, while others are cut out from services they need but which they are unable to pay for.

Both patients and medical care personnel identified means of coping with systemic problems, but these coping mechanisms are unevenly distributed: they require physicians to hold a private practice alongside their public employment, and demand extensive financial resources from the patients. Put otherwise, doctors have unequal access to the resources needed to provide quality care, and patients face unequal possibilities to use them. These systemic problems resulting from the post-socialist reconfiguration of the health care system (and not as a consequence of the communist past as such) could hardly become extinct once market principles further penetrate the functioning of medical care.

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## ***Romanian Sociology Today***

### ***Editorial Note:***

***This is a special section dedicated to research articles  
from the field of Romanian sociology.***



## WRITERS, INTELLECTUALS, POLITICS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CULTURAL FIELD IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

MARIUS LAZĂR<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** The article aims to illustrate the mutual dependencies and transfers between different segments of the cultural field and areas of civic or political activities, together with the function these changes fulfil in redrawing individual trajectories and then the balance of forces. The leading idea is that, in relation with the literary field, the intellectual field is most sensitive to political changes and functions as a regulatory and legitimizing space for writers' everyday practices, via its power to produce the criteria for public recognition and thus for symbolic inclusion and exclusion. This casts a different look on the claims for creative autonomy within the cultural field and its multiple dependencies on media, politics, the civic and the academic field, and the understanding of the inner logic of these domains through the lens of their complex interrelationship.

**Keywords:** intellectuals, writers, cultural field, social networks, postsocialist transformations

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

The implosion of the Ceaușescu regime in December 1989, and the anti-communist turn of events, caught Romanian intellectual elites unprepared, suffocated as they were by more misery and a more oppressive dictatorship than other societies of the same socialist bloc. The collapse came as a surprise, as even the most optimistic expectations had been limited to reform from within à la Gorbachev. Signs of change, inspired by *perestroika*, precipitated some dissent and protests during 1988 and 1989: Cluj university professor Doina

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<sup>2</sup> The author expresses his gratitude for the attentive reading coming from Irina Livezeanu (who provided also competent insights and suggestions in structuring the content) and to Nancy Condee, Andreea Deciu, Emanuela Grama and Emanuela Petrescu, who provided useful comments of the first draft of this article.

Cornea's critical letters to Nicolae Ceaușescu broadcasted by Radio Free Europe; the six former high level communist *apparatchiks'* open letter aired on March 10, 1989 on BBC, and poet Mircea Dinescu's March 17 devastating comments on Ceaușescu's cult of personality, in an interview for the French left-wing newspaper *Libération*, were all perceived as marks of dissidence and bravery, but not as decisive blows against the system.<sup>3</sup> Most of these persons were placed under house arrest and heavy surveillance, were forbidden from appearing in public. Mircea Dinescu was fired from his post at *România literară* [*Literary Romania*]. In response, six other prominent members of the Writers' Union (WU)<sup>4</sup> addressed a new letter in support of Dinescu (as well as Dan Deșliu and Ana Blandiana<sup>5</sup>), to the Union's president. Ordinarily this would have been considered a merely internal, administrative complaint, but since the protesters were brought up on political charges, it too was received as a dissident gesture. Later, when the fall of the Berlin Wall confirmed the inevitable shift in the balance of power in Eastern Europe, such protests multiplied: two letters were sent to Radio Free Europe by another 18 young Romanian writers<sup>6</sup> in November and December 1989 (Tănase, 2002: 153-154). These and several previous actions of public disobedience performed by Paul Goma, Gabriel Andreescu, Mihai Botez and Radu Filipescu, added to the small but now quickly growing pantheon of Romanian resistance to communism.

Intellectuals – mainly writers – became most prominent as dissidents<sup>7</sup> but their initiatives did not really threaten the regime (Gabanyi, 2013). They were rather isolated and seemed almost to serve as proof of the lack of an organized revolutionary movement. When the bloody, violent revolution came, it was the absence of any coordinated intellectual involvement– like those in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary– that stood out.

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<sup>3</sup> Silviu Brucan, Alexandru Bărlădeanu, Corneliu Mănescu, Constantin Părvulescu, Gheorghe Apostol, Grigore Răceanu. Similar bitter protests came also in this period from the former *prolecult* writer Dan Deșliu.

<sup>4</sup> Geo Bogza, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Dan Hăulică, Octavian Paler, Andrei Pleșu, Alexandru Paleologu, Mihai Șora.

<sup>5</sup> Ana Blandiana suffered censorship after one of her books of poetry was discovered as bearing subversive messages.

<sup>6</sup> The list includes Angela Marinescu, Anca Vasiliu, Anca Oroveanu, Andrei Cornea, Radu Bercea, Stelian Tănase, Ioan Buduca, Carmen Francesca Banciu, Gheorghe Iova, Dan Ciachir, Doru Mareș, Bogdan Ghiu, Alin Teodorescu, Dan Oprescu, Liviu Ioan Stoiciu, Mariana Marin, Dan Arsene, Magda Cârneci, Cristian Popescu, Gabriel Stănescu.

<sup>7</sup> In the same period, Petre Mihai Băcanu, Anton Uncu, Mihai Creangă – journalists at *România liberă*, together with Alexandru Chivoiu (typographer), and the economists Elena Gheorghe and Ștefan Niculescu Maier were planning to set up a clandestine publication and were arrested; their case was less publicized

The December revolution brought to power a group of mostly former apparatchiks gathered around the future president Ion Iliescu who stood at the core of a hastily arranged *National Salvation Front* (NSF). Iliescu, a former Communist Party dignitary, was known for opposing Ceaușescu in his last years. His semi-dissidence provided an ambiguous political capital in the post-revolutionary situation. This political capital would turn into a fundamental “bone of contention” for the emerging political field. While Iliescu and the NSF enjoyed acceptance during the first days after the fall of the communist regime, the consensus broke down as soon as Iliescu’s supporters announced the NSF’s intention to compete in elections as a distinct political organization. New political and civic factions formed and started to demonstrate publically against the “communist past” of various contenders and against the “neo-communism” of the new regime that was taking shape.

Through all this the intellectuals seemed to get lost “on their way to power,”<sup>8</sup> (Konrad and Szelényi, 1979; Bozoki A. 1994; Antohi and Tismăneanu, V. 2000; King and Szelényi, 2004) to paraphrase Konrad and Szelényi, and their pre-revolutionary prominence faded amid the human sacrifice of ordinary people in the streets. In order to be able to maintain their claim to moral authority, they then embarked on a new legitimation process. However, a double inferiority complex - internal and external- made their quest precarious.

We might best understand what happened with intellectuals, artists and writers in Romania after 1989 in terms of emotional shock, a frustrating sense of inadequacy, and the coping strategies meant to allay these. Most of the accounts that try to explain their tribulations share a certain psycho-cultural and passionate view of the process (Șiulea, 2003; Gavrilesco, 2006).<sup>9</sup> But there is also a sociological way to make sense of it in terms of intellectuals’ need for a kind of moral insurance that motivated their affiliations to new influence groups that emerged almost instantly from the revolution, creating a structural polarization of alternatives, and forcing almost everyone to take a unilateral stand.

Despite a certain journalistic interest in this topic, there are few social science analyses that are clearly defined theoretically and methodologically, and most of these focus on the socialist period. (Verdery, 1991; Gheorghiu, 2007; Gheorghiu, 2008; Dragomir, 2007; Macrea Toma, 2010; Vasile, 2010; Pălășan,

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of a strong connection between the collapse of the socialist regimes in 1989 and an organized involvement of the intellectual *new class* as revolutionary trigger was one of the most common understandings of the post-communist shift in the early nineties – and this perception was widely assumed by Romanian intelligentsia, also.

<sup>9</sup> Another common approach is rather normative and self-legitimizing, fueled by the struggles within the cultural, ideological and/or artistic field, and is coming from the main actors involved.

Stan and Vasile, 2011; Gabanyi, 2013; Vasile, 2014; Matei, 2004; Gavrilesco, 2006),<sup>10</sup> One area that has been investigated<sup>11</sup> but needs further elaboration is the drastic decrease in the prestige of writers and the crisis in their working conditions and pay levels (see also Gheorghiu, 2007; Lazăr and Livezeanu, 2001).

Here I try to give a “nuts and bolts” for a sociological account of these transformations. I look at the moral stance of intellectual repositionings as forms of symbolic competition (Bourdieu, 1984a; Bourdieu, 1992), linking the reproductive strategies of older and newer members of the *intelligentsia* to the social networks and implicit groupings they were attracted to (Bourdieu, 1994a; Fuchs, 2009; Fuchs 2001a). Thus, I try to show a few mechanisms and the social logic behind the recomposition of the literary and the intellectual fields in a context of major political transformations by presenting and partially deconstructing a few topics pertaining to the issue of cultural change after 1989.

### **The “intellectuals”: social, professional and symbolic hierarchies**

At the centre of this paper sits the figure of the “intellectual.” Some refer to intellectuals as “a dominated fraction of the dominant class” (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu 1984b; Kurzman and Owens, 2002; Kurzman, 2009) , as detainers of “symbolic power” – the ability of naming and defining the public (social, political, moral) agenda in an influential manner - and as an authority legitimized by cultural and symbolic capital more than by their economic status. Often, the intellectual’s capital consists in publishing influential books, studies or articles rather than in simply having a higher degree. It is representative mostly of written culture, which generates this type of symbolic producer as opposed to audiovisual culture. But this does not limit the intellectual’s renown from being spread by all the media and from becoming part of an influential “mediacracy.” Whether s/he is a scholar, a writer, a “critical,” or a “public

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<sup>10</sup> For the period after 1989, changes in the intellectual field were the subject of more extensive treatment by Matei, 2004) through critical analysis of the hegemony of “prestige groups” in the essayistic-philosophical-literary space; by Irina Livezeanu in her papers on post-communist intellectual debates about the recent past, and on the adjustments in the field of history during the transition period in Romania; and by Adrian Gavrilesco, in a well-informed piece on the self-affirmation strategies of public intellectuals, that denounces the “complicities linking the combatant nuclei to our market of ideas.”

<sup>11</sup> Contributions to a sociology of intellectuals include those on the legitimizing discourse of the members of the Group for Social Dialogue (Gheorghiu 2006, 2007; Runceanu, 2008); on the change of ideological codes by agents from the literary field after 1989 (Gheorghiu, 2007); and a pioneering investigation conducted in 1997 by members of the Sociology Department at the Babes-Bolyai University on writers in transition in Cluj (Culic and Lazar, 1997).

intellectual,” due to these attributes, s/he enjoys a certain prestige and public appreciation, being recognized as a pertinent authority whose opinion is often considered and questioned. Secondly, “the intellectual field” is meant to describe the area in which intellectuals act, a ubiquitous and multifaceted domain, which is not fixed but – like any battlefield – takes the form and follows the place of public confrontations (Bourdieu, 1966; Bourdieu, 1984b). The profile, the content, and the limits of this field cannot be prescribed and is defined only by the moving content and agenda of public debate. These definitions thus often remain ambiguous and contextual. In Eastern Europe they hark back to the ambiguities in the social perception of the class system and to the ambiguities of the social transformations,<sup>12</sup> both in socialism and postsocialism: the intellectual is a by-product of these ambiguities and the struggle to construct a distinctive social identity on behalf of a segment of the ruling class (Bourdieu, 1984b; Lazăr, 1999).

The positioning of writers, intellectuals and artists in the socialist system was made through a system of formalized institutional benchmarks: basically, they were treated by the Communist Party as a coopted segment of charismatic or highly skilled experts, strongly needed by the propaganda apparatus, which have to be treated cautiously.<sup>13</sup> But they were officially affiliated to schools (teachers), research centres (researchers), creative guild associations (Unions of writers and artists), cultural magazines, newspapers or publishing houses. Their recruitment and hierarchies within these fields were politically controlled more or less severe by the „Cadres” files (socialist equivalent of contemporary human resources offices). They were all integrated, in a sense, in the system of party “cadres” - and their problems were addressed by the political leadership of the party as both internal bureaucratic problems, regardless of their affiliation (artists or journal editors who were not party members were tolerated: it was assumed that they tacitly adhere to the party’s ideology and are part of the political system as a whole)<sup>14</sup>.

In addition, the party’s ideological production system operated at all levels of the *nomenklatura* - through “cadres” schools and party schools, all related to the core of the communist ideological apparatus should be noted (see also Tolz,

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<sup>12</sup> See the analysis of the two social ontologies of socialism (Lazar, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> See the description of the Communist Party’s strategies for attracting and subordinating the writers and artists (they were labeled altogether as „intellectuals” by the party bureaucrats) to the propaganda apparatus (Macrea Toma, 2010; Vasile, 2010; Vasile, 2011)

<sup>14</sup> Independent artists or autonomous intellectuals barely existed - and only a few artists or musicians are declared “free professionals” and fall into this category. Basically, in 1989, almost all the protagonists of the changes within the cultural field - with pretty fair few exceptions, such as Bogdan Ghiu or, somehow, Adrian Marino - were part of the system and, implicitly, part of the official hierarchic system.

2004). Between these two systems there was some overlap. Leading positions were generally reserved for the activists, although this varied over time, the degree of liberalism within the system and the level of institutional autonomy fluctuating through the period of Stalinist proletcultism, the thaw in the 1960's, and gradually a re-politicization and ideological control in the midst 1970's.

### **Literary or artistic autonomy**

The autonomy of the literary or artistic field is already inscribed in the institutional framework of socialist society, based on two preconditions. On the one hand, the human resources deficit of the regime makes necessary a permanent and external recruitment of "intellectual cadres". These are chosen from the higher educational system, the network of "art schools" (which became in time part of a generalized official establishment), or recruited among the artistic elite and intelligentsia of the old regime - of course, after some measures of ideological control and political enrolment were already taken. These measures might be varying from professional quarantine to political imprisonment and forced ideological conversions. On the other hand, special treatment and a degree of professional freedom is taken from granted as a precondition<sup>15</sup>. The basic idea of professional, literary or artistic autonomy had never been at stake in itself, but the margins of this autonomy and the legitimate limits of the ideological control. A permanent negotiation of autonomy was part of the game and was accepted by the communist apparatus as somehow legitimate. This justified a certain margin of dissent (as opposed to ideological conformism) on the behalf of the creative intelligentsia and also warranted a certain tolerance (as opposed to political intransigence) manifested in different ways and times by the bureaucrats dealing with "the problem of the art and culture sector", as the domain was officially framed.

To some extent, both the dissidence and liberalism were always there, – depending on the players and on how coercive the rules were<sup>16</sup>. As in any strategic game, the partners play for their own interests. For the communist

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<sup>15</sup> See the material and professional conditions, for example, granted during the socialist regime for writes and artist that could be interpreted as social privilege also, if compared to the standard working people, condition which made them be labeled as a *priviligentsia* by some critics (Macrea Toma, 2010; see also Gabanyi, 2010, Vasile, 2010 and Vasile, 2014)

<sup>16</sup> As Petru Negură put it, related to members of Writer's Union from Moldova, intellectuals were "neither heroes, nor traitors", because the higher the power position they could occupy within the political system, the larger their margins of liberalism, in opinion or actions, they could access (Negură, 2014). See further the presentation of Adrian Păunescu's case.

leadership, at stake was an indefinite extension of their control if they could determine everyone to accept as settled the idea of the permanent leading role of the Party. For intellectuals, out of petty immediate advantages, at stake was the opportunity to design alternative cultural models and, of course, an effective persuasion to enforce them. During the negotiations, each partner hoped to lure the other - and each appealed to tactics meant to weaken the vigilance or misguide the opponent. And on each side, depending on the ability to control and impose homogeneity to the entire team, appeared partners willing to transact and gain personal advantage - material or symbolic. Therefore, the fight is not only over victory at the expense of the other, but is over maintaining control over the game by controlling one's own group. The Party addressed the problem of cultural producers as if they were a "cadre" problem, while intellectuals used, when appropriate, either patriotism, ethics as well as cultural ambitions or vanity of *nomenklatura* members, to redefine the situation in their own interest. That is why radicalized opponents of the regime (like Goma, for instance) could not gain support inside institutions such as the Writer's Union: they were jeopardizing the very basis of the writers privileges, not easily gained by a cultural elite whose creative autonomy was to some extent accepted by the government. Thus, protesters not only were not supported, but they faced hostility or indifference from fellow writers. Literary dissent was rare in the early stages of post-Stalinism.

The balance breaks down after 1977-78, when the communist leadership itself was no longer able to abide by the pact and tried to drastically limit cultural autonomy, already quite limited. The idea of protest and dissent started to gain attention. During the 1980s, when the general situation in Romania became increasingly critical and the freedom of speech further limited, emigration became the most common form of opposition, an extreme, desperate solution, whereby writers risked a complete loss of artistic identity. The intellectual "haemorrhage" of the 1980s and the multiplication of gestures of open dissent after 1987 were symptoms of a growing crisis in the pact between the communist political power and the intellectuals. They indicate the decomposition of the literary field itself before 1989 and before it became visible in the post-1989 "transition" era. But the Revolution of 1989 came over before intelligentsia's attitudes radicalized and "snowballed" to potentially make them initiators of the change. The generalized self-culpability that followed was a belated response to the sense of resignation and helplessness experienced during the hardest years of dictatorship.

The transformations of the Eastern European societies after 1989 brought out, surprisingly, a diminished status for the writers, artists and intellectuals, as compared with their positions held in socialist times (Lazăr and Livezeanu,

2001). Largely acclaimed as main agents of the political resistance or heroes of the mobilization that led to the revolutionary change, these exemplary social echelons were among the first to experience deception and decay. Writers, for example, „were not needed [any more] to defend the nation’s very right to exist [...], nor were they needed as the voice of conscience in oppressive regimes” as one of the authorized connoisseurs of the region notice (Wachtel, 2003:5). “The creation of fledgling civil societies, democratic governments, and market economies in East European countries brought an end to the «objective conditions» that had placed writers on a pedestal for a century and a half” (Wachtel, 2003: 5). More explicitly, in Romania, the collapse of the old socialist system of editorial production and distribution of books and the adjustment of the production of new entrepreneurs, now private, to the requirements of the market economy, lead to both the diversification of the editorial offer and a progressive decrease of the number of copies published at national level, together with a drastic decrease in the prestige of the belletrist author and an acute worsening of his/her working conditions and pay levels (Gheorghiu, 2007, Lazăr and Livezeanu, 2001, Wachtel, 2003; Wachtel, 2006). Other areas – such as print and audiovisual media or higher education – have, however, known an upward dynamic, constituted as the poles of attraction for the subjects rejected by the contraction of the literary field, whose alterations in trajectory towards the most accessible areas in terms of types of accumulated capital (educational, symbolic, civic or political) are accompanied by specific conversion movements.

### **Competitions within and outside the field**

The ambivalent position of the writer within the power system of socialism explains the permanent distress of the literary and artistic field as a tolerated continuous competition among artistic producers. It also explains why, during the confrontations over expanded autonomy, actors were competing each other in groups that were opposing not only artists on one side and party bureaucrats on the other, but in mixed teams of artists *and* bureaucrats, in each camp. “Us” and “them” always comprises composite squads of artists/writers/ intellectuals, professional Party activists and administrative bureaucrats, on all fronts.

A confirmation of this elementary – but after 1989 intensely denied – fact is an episode following the first months of the collapse of the regime of Ceaușescu. At the time, the bloody repression of the protesters of Timișoara and Bucharest in December 1989 led to a collective political trial, of the former

members of Executive Political Committee of Communist Party (CPex). Among them was Gogu Rădulescu, a high ranking nomenklatura member, who was close to members of the cultural elite. Ion Ianoși in his memoir summarized what happened next:

On the initiative - or with the consent - of writers who were close to him, intellectuals drafted a memorandum .... The text stated that Gogu Rădulescu continued to maintain contact, "especially in the last decade", with "a number of prominent intellectuals, some of them dissidents, helping them as much as he could and absolutely disinterested", and he supported also "in the more distant past, personalities of national culture marginalized or oppressed by the regime, such as Arghezi, Noica, Maria Tănase, Victor Slăvescu, S. Cioculescu and many others. (...) Gogu Radulescu saved some lives in the most *ad literam* meaning. (...) In recent years, dozens of writers, painters, and musicians benefited from his generous attitude, either managing to honour invitations abroad thanks to the signature of Gogu Rădulescu, their claims being repeatedly rejected by the passport office - or getting through his intervention of solving difficult and sometimes dramatic life problems(Ianoși, 2012: 697-698).

Thirty five prominent members of the intelligentsia, fellows of the Writers' Union or Artists' Union,<sup>17</sup> (some of them, like Mircea Dinescu, Dan Hăulică or Alexandru Paleologu had been dissidents) – signed this memorandum. Rădulescu benefited later of some clemency as a result. The case is interesting because it reveals the role played by politically well positioned figures as negotiators from within – or *brokers* linked to personal and informal networks transgressing institutional affiliations, in the sense described by Barbara Walker and Vera Tolz for the early communist Soviet literary world (Tolz, 2004; Walker, 2004; Tomoff, 2004).

This support for a former member of the most stigmatized political organization of the time reflects the ambiguous position held until then by intellectuals within the communist system: the same people that condemned communism and the Ceaușescu regime in the harshest terms were also trying to rescue an exponent of their network. It is also a confirmation that the social network protects itself beyond ideological criteria; it proves that group solidarity is more important as a resource for survival and reproduction of positions than it is the ideological principle that is supposed unifying the group.

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<sup>17</sup> The entire list is: Geo Bogza, Augustin Buzura, Zigu Ornea, Nicolae Manolescu, Mihai Giugariu, Dan Setlacec, Ana Blandiana, Acad. Al Rosetti, Eugen Simion, Dan Hăulică, Dan Grigore, Cristian Mandeal, Valentin Gheorghiu, Ștefan Gheorghiu, Romulus Rusan, Cristina Angelescu, Cristian Popișteanu, Valeria Seciu, Adina Darian, Voichița Ivașcu, Ing. Horia Cosma, F. Boeraș, Gabriel Dimisianu, Horia Andreescu, Al. Paleologu, Radu Cosașu, Dan C. Mihăilescu, Tania Radu, Ion Ianoși, Anemone Latzina, Szász János, Mircea Dinescu, Marin Sorescu, Marta Camarache, Dinu Cernescu (Ianoși, 2012).

This example shows how “cultural change” and the “transition” worked. On the one hand, the process is often described as a fight between former communist and new anti- or post-communist “forces” – as a confrontation between two ideologically split camps. On the other hand, on close examination, it exposes a complex world of groups and groupings, multiple interactions, multiple dependencies and individualized strategies, which make the entire picture more diffuse and puzzling. The persistence of these groupings after 1989 suggests a relative continuity between pre- and post-Revolution intellectual social worlds. Change may be recognized in terms of innovative forms of placing actors within networks on alignments which reproduce the group frontiers in a new context. Shifting contexts modify the form and configuration of confrontations, their modes of legitimation and the positions at stake, but not the opponents.

### **Networks, groups and politics: “social dialogue” in the heart of elitism**

When the revolution exploded in December 1989 writers were mobilized to discuss their urgent problems at the Writer’s House: on December 21 – the day of Ceaușescu’s last speech, when the guns began to be heard in Bucharest, following those heard four days earlier in Timișoara. But nothing important happened that day. Some representatives of the (then) younger generation (Florin Iaru, Stelian Tănase, Dan Pavel) remember going to see what was happening in the capital and were caught by the police together with other protesters. Then they became “revolutionaries” – and the next day, Pavel and Tănase were among the demonstrators cheering the flight of Ceaușescu by helicopter, and occupying the Central Committee building. The same day, at the newly proclaimed “Free Romanian Television”, Ion Iliescu, revolutionaries and former dissidents, some of them coming straight from house arrest, announced the coming at power of the *National Salvation Front*. On December 22, in another gathering at the Writer’s House, the president of the Writers’ Union, D. R. Popescu resigned, assuming responsibility for the obstructive politics he had carried out since 1981, to block the Writers’ Union committees and suffocate protests. Later, on December 28, a new leading committee was formed (*Comitetul provizoriu al Uniunii Scriitorilor*), with the following membership: Mircea Dinescu-president; Ana Blandiana, Dan Deșliu, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Domokos Géza, Octavian Paler, Eugen Simion, Stelian Tănase, and Dan Hăulică as spokesman. With Stelian Tănase’s exception (he hasn’t been yet even a member of the Union) all the fellows of this new leadership were either intellectual dissidents (as Dinescu, Blandiana, Deșliu, Doinaș, Paler, Hăulică), or respected members of the Union like Simion and the Hungarian minority representative, Domokos Geza.

This was an important signal to the artistic and intellectual community: the writers eliminated the “Ceaușist” leadership and regained dignity by lining up behind the few symbols of Romanian resistance. They used this manoeuvre to confirm their opposition to Ceaușescu and the prestige of their guild.<sup>18</sup>

In the first days after the Revolution, dissidents were celebrated everywhere and invited to enter the new editorial teams of now free literary publications. “Compromised” members and “collaborators” were purged – and, inevitably, the latter founded new publications. But the whole press, old and new, daily or weekly, political or artistic, joined the NSF and the revolution. Everything associated with Ceaușescu was stigmatized – and everybody made claims and complaints. Symbolic competition for grabbing and showing off moral capital, as well as for capitalizing on accumulated prestige, prevailed. “Resisters” and “dissidents”, or just rank and file actors on the cultural scene, had all shared - and now gradually detached themselves from - the culture of socialism. Most of them also denied belonging to the official hierarchy, proposing instead symbolic hierarchies and moral, rather than formal, biographies. These new bios were the effect of the capitalization of social prestige and moral order that instituted a different sort of legitimate hierarchy.

**Table 1.**

**Types of cultural producers, degree of politicization and intellectual or literary autonomy before 1989**

	<b>Party-affiliated (Communist Party)</b>	<b>Not party-affiliated - Internal</b>	<b>Diaspora</b>
<b>Literary field</b>	Official propaganda writers (1950's socialist realists); „Săptămîna” magazine (E. Barbu, CV. Tudor); A. Păunescu – late 1970's, 1980's	Autonomous writers (lyrics and poetry, novel) – maximum autonomy: late 1960's until early 1980's	Independent writers (i.e. Eugen Ionescu, Vintilă Horia)
<b>Literary and intellectual field</b>	Ideologues of socialist realism, zhdanovists, “protochronists”, censors.	- Literary critics (N. Manolescu, E. Simion, M. Iorgulescu) - Essayists (Liiceanu, Pleșu, Păltiniș school)	Radio “Free Europe” literary critics (Monica Lovinescu, Virgil Ierunca)
<b>Intellectual field</b>	Political propagandists	Independent thinkers surviving interwar period (Noica, N. Steinhardt)	M. Eliade, E. Cioran etc.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps for the same motive, the Writers' Union was never reformed properly. After a new conference held in the same year, the leadership of Writers' Union remained in the same hands, mostly, and with the same organizational principles, dysfunctional within the economic changes of the transition, unable to maintain the professional standards or create a solidarity among its members as it happened before.

But many writers were stigmatized in 1989. One example is the poet Adrian Păunescu. The complete opposite of Gogu Rădulescu, Păunescu, a prolific and very talented poet, was acclaimed by a public that he had himself created through *Cenaclul Flacăra* (the *Flame* poetry group) a vast popular pageant of music, art and political propaganda he ran from 1973 to 1985 (Mocănescu, 2011: 95). His huge popularity and charisma made him one of the most effective propagandists of the Ceaușescu regime and transformed his show – held in stadium full of young people - into an important vehicle of a nationalism that increasingly displaced Marxism Leninism in the official discourse. An editor of the important wide-circulation magazine *Flacăra*, his triple success as poet, journalist, and propagandist made him politically influential. Other writers kept their distance from him. In the *Cenaclul Flacăra* show Păunescu often flattered the “Supreme Leader” and enjoyed political and symbolic favours in return (Gabanyi, 2013). Păunescu was thus in a position to intervene for some of his colleagues in distress, for instance when Marin Sorescu lost his position as editor in chief of the revue *Ramuri* (Branches) and his right to sign, being involved in a Securitate murky provocation (Gabanyi, 2013). But Păunescu remained stigmatized by the writers’ guild after the revolution; he was labelled a “court poet” and collaborator, and eventually ended up rallying the former Communist high executive of the Communist Party, Ilie Verdeț (ex-prime minister of Romania under Ceaușescu) as a founder of *Partidul Socialist al Muncii* [the *Socialist Party of Labour*]. This party strangely associated with the radical nationalists of *Partidul Romania Mare* [the *Greater Romania Party*] led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor. Finally, Păunescu joined *Partidul Social-Democrat* [the *Social-Democratic Party*], the last public face of the former *National Salvation Front* in solidarity with Ion Iliescu.

Table 2.

**Types of cultural producers, their degree of politicization  
and autonomy – 1990-2004**

	<b>Party-affiliated (multiparty system)</b>	<b>Not party-affiliated internal and Diaspora</b>
<b>Literary field</b>	Stelian Tănase (PAC, PNL 93), Augustin Buzura (FSN), CV. Tudor (Greater Romania Party), A. Păunescu (PSD, PSD)	Autonomous writers facing economic decomposition of the field; market dependency
<b>Literary and intellectual field</b>	N. Manolescu – political career (PAC, PNL) Al. Paleologu (PNL)	Literary critics (E. Simion, M. Iorgulescu, Al. Cistelescan) Essayists (Liiceanu, Pleșu, Patapievici)
<b>Intellectual field</b>	AC (Civic Alliance) – nonparty Democratic Convention	GDS (Group for Social Dialogue RAS (Romanian Academic Society - Alina Mungiu) NEC (New Europe College)

The writer Eugen Barbu, the former director of the weekly publication *Săptămâna culturală a Capitalei* [*The Cultural Week of the Capital*], and the younger poet Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Barbu's right hand man were similarly stigmatized. Both were hated for their political denunciations, for public defamation of many writers who had faced difficult political position and the calumnious tone of their weekly. Barbu was a member of the Party Central Committee but was at war with the whole Writers' Union since 1979 because of plagiarism accusations regarding some of his novels. The Union condemned the plagiarism – and Barbu threatened to leave the Communist Party in protest. But he did not. After that, he and his publication were used occasionally by the tough wing of the propaganda apparatus (nationalist, anti-Semitic, strongly xenophobic) against the broadcasters of *Radio Free Europe* - especially Monica Lovinescu, Virgil Ierunca and other exiled Romanian writers. Barbu was the first to be excluded from the Writers' Union in 1990.

A pall fell upon Eugen Barbu and Corneliu Vadim Tudor. Their names could not appear in any publication, in spite of the heated political context of the first year of freedom. The ban ended in august 1990, when Corneliu Vadim Tudor obtained from Iliescu's Government subsidies for a new publication, *România Mare* [*Greater Romania*], which was stridently xenophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Hungarian, antidemocratic, apologetic for the prior *Securitate* and the Ceaușescu regime, poorly and scandalously written – and in the business of the moral assassination of former anti-communist opposition. Barbu became shadowed in this new arrangement. Soon, most of the former dissident writers and Barbu's enemies – together with the representatives of the new civic organizations opposing FSN – were again under attack. In 1991 Corneliu Vadim Tudor founded the *Greater Romania Party* and was co-opted into the government coalition, along with the former FSN (now FDSN), the *National Unity Party of Romanians* (PUNR), gathering mainly Romanian nationalists from Transylvania, and the *Socialist Party of Labour* (PSD) of the former communist nomenklatura. Thus a cultural (mainly writers') opposition was in part shaping the political field. Twenty years later the reverse would happen.

### **The Group for Social Dialogue and the Intellectual power utopia**

The writers' aura was endangered after the revolution by the new economic conditions and the emergence of a new segment of the cultural field – that of civic intellectuals. In December 1989 *Grupul pentru Dialog Social* [*the Group for Social Dialogue - GSD*], made its entrance. An informal grouping at first, GSD was to exert a tremendous influence in the post-revolution public life, cementing the political opposition around a civic project.

GSD was founded in the early days of the revolution around the networking efforts of Mihnea Berindei, president of the *French Committee for Human Rights in Romania*.<sup>19</sup> Immediately after entering the country on 1989 December 22 with several aid trucks, Berindei contacted a number of Romanian dissidents - Mariana Celac (December 23), Radu Filipescu (December 28) and Gabriel Andreescu who, apparently, put Berindei in contact with Andrei Pleșu and Gabriel Liiceanu. Berindei also contacted Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Alexandru Paleologu and Stelian Tănase. On December 29, the Romanian Television announced that a “group for reflection” that included Andrei Pleșu, Octavian Paler, Alexandru Paleologu, and Gabriel Liiceanu was established (Răduță, 2005). The contrast created by these austere intellectuals to the disarticulated and chaotic revolutionary discourses heard until then was huge. Liiceanu read that evening, on television, *A Call to Sycophants (lichele)*, in which he asked morally compromised members of the old regime (the sycophants) to step back and be silent.

The next day the *Group for Social Dialogue* announced its establishing in a press conference. GSD began publishing a weekly, 22 - the day in December 1989 the Romanian revolution had arisen. Its first issue of January 20 featured a *Declaration of Principles*. The group undertook a saving mission in almost post-apocalyptic terms: It aimed to represent the moral conscience of our humiliated and destroyed society. We want to contribute to overcoming the disaster and to regenerating our country”. GSD affirmed its political independence from the NSF and the just re-emerged “historical” political parties (PNL, PNT, PSD), equally: “The Group for Social Dialogue is an independent and strictly informal group, it is not subordinated to any political party, that rejects any cooperation with anybody connected with the old regime” (see also Runceanu, 2008).

This statement represents a mix of missionary and enlightened program by which the intellectuals saw themselves at the symbolic centre of a society to be re-founded on moral bases. GSD imagined itself simultaneously as a sort of intellectual “Salvation Front” and group similar to KOR, as in 1970s Poland. The intellectuals proclaimed themselves representatives of “civil society” and

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<sup>19</sup> Here is Berindei’s telling about his networking action: “In December I came up with the idea to know these people, many of whom I had never seen. Meanwhile I knew Mariana Celac and Mihai Botez. On the evening of December 25 I called Mariana (I was with Anton and Ariadna Combes) there were still shootings, I managed to convince someone to drive us there. I was at the Intercontinental, I went through the back of the street, on Dacia Boulevard, I crossed two barrages and took Mariana with us: it was a huge moment. The next day at Andrei Pleșu (more exactly, at Ascanio Damian’s place) I met many others. Then I went to look for Radu Filipescu and Gabriel Andreescu, I returned with them to Pleșu and so the GDS was done, in part. At St. Augustin Doinaș I met Alec Paleologu, who told me about Stelian Tanase and about another group (the 18 who had signed the letter). They had too the idea of a GDS, which quickly took shape.” (*Revista 22*, No. 30(21): 9).

contributed to its reconstruction, keeping their distance from politics (“The group does not wish to be a centre of power, but a centre of influence” – says the *Declaration*).

Such GSD statements reveal an imagery of power and symbolic dominance that construct retrospectively what intellectuals thought should have happened before 1989 - but did not. They express also a wishful self-affiliation to a noble tradition of resistance organized by East-European intellectuals in late communism. It is a fictional group-biography and post-hoc action taking, which turns their public interventions into a normative, regulative stance. The ideal of pre-revolutionary solidarity and resistance, imagined following other East-European models considered successful, became a measure for what *should now* happen in Romania, after the fall of communism. This attitude suggests a prevalent inferiority complex, associated with a need to change the past: actions planned for the present intended, involuntarily, to correct history. They also trace the contours of a constant anti-communist attitude that became the Group’s main political mark and criterion for public position taking for years to come<sup>20</sup>.

The background of GSD members was heterogeneous – and the January 1990 Declaration of principles itself look like a negotiated project, joining different perspectives and mixed ideologies: conservatism and anticommunism coexisted with a social emancipatory and constructivist project. Political involvement, assumed at an individual level, was refused by the group as a whole. GSD expressed a general reluctance toward parties and “politicianism”. Members of GSD joined the mass protests of January 1990. These were occasioned by the NSF declaring its intention to abandon a politically neutral position and run in elections that spring. “We are not parties” was the slogan under outstanding members of GSD regrouped in the streets, like thousands of others in Bucharest (Adameşteanu, 2014: 359).

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<sup>20</sup> A sociological survey I coordinated in 1997, based on standardized interviews carried out in the city of Cluj with local writers (Lazar and Culic, 1997) revealed a bipartite authority within the literary field of the ‘90s. When asked about the most prominent contemporary cultural personalities of the moment, the interviewees clustered around two kinds of options: one naming as key authoritative figures mainly the glorified leaders of literary field, and the other naming mostly essayists and intellectuals recognized as ideological trend-setters and civic opinion leaders. The literary field blended together two instances of legitimation: a literary one and an ideological one. The inner, autonomous, mechanism of recognition and promotion specific to the literary field before 1989 was slowly replaced by an external one, coming from the field of the new ideological debates set up by the ‘intellectuals’. These findings encourage a parallel examination of the various recompositions of the political field after 1989, on one hand, and of the media, the intellectual, and the literary fields, on the other hand. In time, such recompositions reshape and restructure the former ideological divisions, and different intellectual groups become more and more aware of their biases, and more willing to acknowledge them openly.

Yet, after the smashing victory of NSF and Iliescu, in May 1990, and the mass violence coordinated by NSF against the opposition (GSD included) in June, when large groups of miners from the Jiu Valley came to Bucharest to “put things in order” – GSD started to regroup as an opposition force. It inspired the creation of the *Alianța Civică* [*Civic Alliance*], which would be the expression of the outside-party way of being involved in big politics, in respect both for distancing from politics and assuming responsibility for the Romanian civil rights (Pavel, 2003). The *Civic Alliance* gathered the political opponents of Ion Iliescu for the 1992 and 1996 elections and it was an important factor for the success of the *Democratic Convention* in seizing power in 1996 (Runceanu, 2008). The symbolic capital intellectuals held within these double faced electoral arrangements: civic-based in exterior, and political in interior, was most effective in these political confrontations.

These evolutions brought an end to the civic momentum inside intellectual utopia. Instead, they were making room for a much engaged and open party-based political involvement, marked by inner struggles, which emphasized the heterogeneous nature of the genuine group. From the beginning, who was in and who was out was a term of dispute (Runceanu, 2008), even though the group was informal and (in theory) open. In fact, it held together political dissidents such as Gabriel Andreescu and Radu Filipescu, cultural dissidents such as Paleologu, Doinaș and architect Mariana Celac, prestigious philosophers or essayists such as Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Pleșu, members of the semi-dissident group of young writers from the so-called “generation ’80” (Stelian Tănase, Magda Cârnelci, Dan Pavel) and sociologists like Pavel Câmpeanu, Alin Teodorescu, Călin Anastasiu and many others. GSD was trying to harmonize different influences: one was supposed to come directly from NSF, from the powerful Silviu Brucan, who provided a premises for GSD (he was rewarded with a long interview in the first number of 22); Pavel Câmpeanu and the sociologists were presumed to be, at first “Brucan’s people”. Gabriel Andreescu and Radu Filipescu received the support of Mihnea Berindei and the *French Committee for Human Rights Defence in Romania* (very active since 1977); Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, from the Romanian section of *Radio Free Europe*, supported Gabriel Liiceanu. Both of them had an enormous influence among writers. Stelian Tănase hailed from the group of young writers, who tried to line up in the last moment to the Eastern European changes that occurred after the Berlin wall fell down. All of them felt that “something has to be done” (Tănase, 2002: 153-154; Adameșteanu, 2014)<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> It is the “letter of the 18 intellectuals” which was broadcast by RFE on December 18, after the protests started in Timisoara and people were already shot on the streets. The list includes Angela Marinescu, Anca Vasiliu, Anca Oroveanu, Andrei Cornea, Radu Bercea, Stelian Tănase, Ioan Buduca, Carmen Francesca Banciu, Gheorghe Iova, Dan Ciachir, Doru Mareș, Bogdan Ghiu, Alin Teodorescu, Dan Opreșcu, Liviu Ioan Stoiciu, Mariana Marin, Dan Arsene, Magda Cârnelci, Cristian Popescu, Gabriel Stănescu.

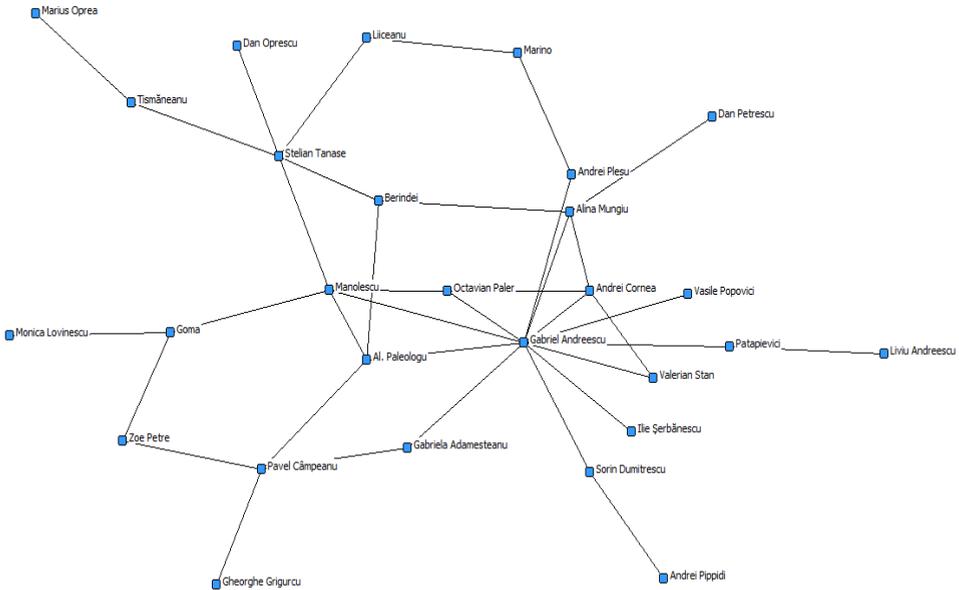
So the general picture shows GSD as a nexus of different groups whose dissimilarities were at first harmonized through a discourse assuming a symbolic unity, but which eventually exploded inside GSD. The Group became a sounding for various kinds of interests: the Romanian emigration – which was split generationally and ideologically between the interwar political class, forced to emigrate at the end of World War II - and the new emigration that left during socialism; those who aspired to a renewed cultural legitimation and new resources for cultural prestige; those covering an uncomfortable past and who later would be discovered as collaborators of the political police; those prolonging their dissidence into a civic renewing project, etc.

These heterogeneous backgrounds and influences brought comments and disputes among the founding members, as they debated the GSD's position toward monarchy, political involvement, Romanian interwar far right, toward nationalism. In all these debates positions continued to polarize rather than come to a consensus. The 22 weekly reflected these dissensions from the beginning. Their echo amplified and started to erode the initial solidarity of the founders.

Figure 1 presents the diagram of confrontations between the main contributors, and it reveals the conflicting relationship of the core members of GSD in the first years of the organization (1990-1996) and the adversarial relations among each of them (depicted by lines), as monitored by time in the GSD official, 22 magazine. It is not about relations of adversity among GSD members, but about mutual disapproval and polemical exchange of ideas. The centre of this net of conflicts is occupied by Gabriel Andreescu – who tended to bear most of the polemics – Alina Mungiu and Stelian Tănase. All of them were excluded, in time, from GSD.

The positioning here of Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Cornea deserve a more detailed discussion, because their trajectory was received as a promise for an alternative culture to the institutionalized socialist system: under the political control, socialism could not produce outstanding outcomes (with a few exceptions), because it lacked the motivation for “a high-performance culture” and the cult of exceptionality, as these authors stated (Liiceanu, 1983). These were the words of philosopher Constantin Noica, whose disciples they were, their close relationship being described as an informal sort of “school”, based in informal teaching and cultural transmission in a series a books signed by Gabriel Liiceanu. These books (*The Păltiniș Journal - 1983; Epistolary -1986*) enjoyed a huge popularity in the literary and intellectual world and became a cult. Noica was a charismatic figure, a philosopher from the same generation of Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade and Eugen Ionescu – distinguished Romanian cultural émigrés – whose friend he was.

**Figure 1. Diagram of disagreements and confrontational relationships between members of the Group of Social Dialogue between 1990-1998.**



Noica's very ambitious work started in the 1930s, but was interrupted by political detention (was a member of the fascist *Iron Guard*). He accomplished as an ambitious and original philosophical synthesis, a *Treatise of Ontology*, which incorporates Romanian ethnocentric themes in a Hegelian and Heideggerian net of concepts. Withdrawing to a small mountain locality – like Heidegger -, at Păltiniș, Noica started to plead for a “Great Culture” in which the Greek and German classical philosophy set the standards. At the time he was also – unsuccessfully – searching for 22 young geniuses in order to form a highly-trained cultural elite and he expected from the communist authorities to sponsor the project. As told by his disciples, Liiceanu and Plesu, his personality elicited a fascination from young generation of intellectuals and scholars. It soon became a cult: people from all over the country were visiting the philosopher, searching for crucial professional advice, a personal confirmation in career, an assessment.

In this respect, the “Paltinis school” challenged the dominant model of a literary-based culture, in which the writer and the literary critic were the central figures, proposing an elite philosophy oriented high culture, subversive, informal, external to the institutionalized system. This became both highly

prestigious and dissident at the same time, raising extraordinary expectations for cultural renewal. Thus, the number 22 – which provided the title of the GSD periodical – acquired a new meaning, as a discrete marker of a new elite group, with a redeeming mission and exceptional destiny.

Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Plesu and Andrei Cornea were all involved in the creation of GSD – but, soon, Plesu did not consider himself a proper GSD member<sup>22</sup>, being coopted in the first NSF government (to which GSD was in opposition), as Minister of Culture (December 1989 – October 1991). Pleșu also disliked a certain intransigence that seemed to lead the members of GSD to a moral and political Manicheism. In 1993 he founded an alternative weekly magazine called *Dilema*. He considered this title would invite to calm, reflection and a balanced attitude. Noica's alternative elite project was realized finally as an *Institute for Advanced Studies, New Europe College* (NEC)<sup>23</sup> – a private institution, connected to a European network of similar colleges based in Berlin, Vienna and Budapest. NEC recruited fellows in a strictly parsimonious way. The first cohorts graduating their programs re-enacted, coincidentally, the magic number of 22.... Soon, NEC became a true school for elites and a basis for recruitment for different administrative positions, either cultural or political (the network of Institutes created after 1999, Romanian Cultural Institute, Ministry of External Affairs) during governments supported by GSD activists.

### **A Politicized intellectual field**

The connection with the Romanian political cycle has to be mentioned<sup>24</sup>. After the Democratic Convention won the elections of 1996, it easily lost them in 2000. For another four years Iliescu and his followers held the power in an authoritative manner, often accused as suffocating the free circulation of opinion and boycotting the press. The Democratic Convention (DC) and the Civic Alliance collapsed altogether – and with them evaporated the whole project of a civic-intellectual filter of politics. This implied great losses for those involved in it.

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<sup>22</sup> Personal communication with Andrei Pleșu at NEC, Bucharest, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> [www.nec.ro](http://www.nec.ro). [Last accessed: 25.05.2015].

<sup>24</sup> Here is a short chronology of the main political course involving these regroupements: Petru Clej, *Lingem acolo unde am scuiapat – cronologie politică românească*, in *Acum*, february 6, 2011, [file:///C:/Users/Marius/Desktop/PITTSBURGH\\_INTELLECTUALI/Cronologii/BĂESCU/Lingem%20acolo%20unde%20am%20scuiapat%20%E2%80%93%20cronologie%20politic%C4%83%20rom%C3%A2neasc%C4%83%20%E2%80%94%20ACUM.TV.htm](file:///C:/Users/Marius/Desktop/PITTSBURGH_INTELLECTUALI/Cronologii/BĂESCU/Lingem%20acolo%20unde%20am%20scuiapat%20%E2%80%93%20cronologie%20politic%C4%83%20rom%C3%A2neasc%C4%83%20%E2%80%94%20ACUM.TV.htm) [Last accessed: 25.05. 2015].

The opposition regrouped around the *National Liberal Party* and the *Democrat Party* (a wing of NSF which defected from the Iliescu group and drew close of DC). Soon they formed another coalition, aiming to capitalize the former energy of the DC electorate. The new coalition was *Alianța DA* [*Yes Alliance*]. Former intellectual supporters of the Democratic Convention migrated to this new alliance, a movement which reproduced largely the former division that separated former NSF and the anti-communists.

While intellectual unity was temporarily maintained, an intense ideological polarization started. It was fuelled by controversies around the anti-modernist content of the writings of Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu and Horia Roman Patapievici – a new name cultivated by the *22* magazine, rapidly coopted among the former Păltiniș School members. At stake was also the hegemonic position the group started to occupy within the intellectual field. A book of Sorin Matei Adam (Matei 2004), insidiously titled *Boierii minții* [*Boyars of the mind*], which tried to explain sociologically the dominant position held by the Păltiniș school fellows, which saw them altogether as a Weberian *status group*, capitalizing on the cultural influence and controlling the “market of ideas”, launched heated debates in the cultural media. In retaliation, the “Păltiniș school” members mobilized their devotees (some of NEC alumni among them) in order to display their public support. The so-called *Intellectual quarrel* (*Cearta intelectualilor*) occupied all the summer of 2004 and rekindled the next year. A polarizing division occurred within the intellectual field (Livezeanu, 2003).<sup>25</sup> “Păltiniș school” members regrouped, started to speak about a new conservatism. They grew more vocal in asserting an anti-liberal ideology. Hence, ideological polarization fragmented the intellectual field and divided those positioned closer to liberalism or to conservatism (the last ones being recruited mostly among NEC and new GDS members).

The *Yes Alliance* won the elections of 2004 and Traian Băsescu, leader of the Democrat Party, became president. Andrei Pleșu was his presidential adviser, while Horia Roman Patapievici became president of *Romanian Cultural Institute* (*Institutul Cultural Român - ICR*). He replaced the novelist Augustin Buzura (close to former president Ion Iliescu). Soon, the relationship among the allies deteriorated and a huge gap occurred among the followers, intellectuals included. Traian Băsescu managed to gain the support of most GSD members and especially those close to Andrei Pleșu and Gabriel Liiceanu. In 2006 Băsescu officially condemned communism – an older demand of Romanian postcommunist intelligentsia - reading an incriminating report of a commission specially

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<sup>25</sup> Diagrams BI and BII show the space of mutual affinities and dissimilarities among the main debaters.

instituted, coordinated by Vladimir Tismăneanu, a Romanian born professor at University of Maryland who left the country in the 1980s. These GDS intellectuals remained constant supporters of the President during the most difficult political moments he confronted<sup>26</sup>. The anti-presidential media labelled them as “Băsescu’s intellectuals”. Liberal opponents within the intellectual field positioned themselves, in all circumstances, against Băsescu and, implicitly, against “his” intellectual guard.

The intellectual field became thus politically marked. Research institutes dealing with the memory of Communism (ICCMER) and the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) – claimed by the civic intellectuals of the 90’s and territorialized by them during the Democratic Convention and Yes Alliance governments, became terrains of disputes in which leading positions were symbolically and intellectually legitimized, but politically obtained (see also Adameşteanu, 2014). The cultural field lost its autonomy vis a vis politics. And this was exactly what the intellectuals of 1989 were fighting against.

## Conclusions

Immediately after 1989, the political changes in Romania engaged strong repositioning reactions on the behalf of those who until then were recognized as writers (novelists, poets, literary critics and essayists) and public figures. These repositionings were largely determined by the new political engagements for or against the renewed political power structures of the 1990s, controlled from the very beginning by a group clustered around a new leader, former high-ranking Communist Party official: Ion Iliescu. If in the first days after the fall of the communist regime in December 1989 a wide consensus against Ceauşescu as a leader and a person existed, this consensus was soon broken and various political parties and factions started to publicly manifest their divergent agendas, engaging different and often opposite values and world views.

Delegitimizing the previous regime immediately became one of the dominant patterns of self-assertion in the public sphere; so was demonizing the forms of “collaborationism”, comparable to those of post-WWII France, described by Giselle Sapiro (Sapiro, 1999). These worked together with exhibiting the signs of former “dissidence”, “disobedience” or “resistance”. For intellectuals, “the resistance through culture” became the common self-legitimizing compensatory myth, a way of- re-appropriating an uncomfortable and most often silent past.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ziare.com/politica/cotroceni/parabola-intelectualilor-lui-Basescu-1298245>;  
<http://www.contributors.ro/cultura/o-ultima-precizare-despre-%E2%80%9Eintelectualii-lui-Basescu%E2%80%9D/> [Last accessed: 25.05.2015].

Intellectuals also were promoting a symbolic economy of classes, opposed to “objectivist” classification system (in Bourdieu's terms – see Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1984b; Bourdieu, 1994a; Bourdieu, 1994b) of Marxist origin, with its standardized categories (workers, peasants, intellectuals) being handled in practice as homogeneous “blocks” and suppressing individual qualities. Thus they were in fact trying to substitute physical strength - objectified as a political force - with symbolic power and endorse moral principles as foundations for a new social order.

A need for a moral securitization motivated almost instantly the affiliation to the new influence groups emerging at the Revolution. The Revolution of 1989 created a utopia of the civic intellectual whose public intervention could change history and create more freedom. Civic and intellectual organizations were meant to objectify Havel's idea of a “power of the powerless” and were engaged in the transformations acting first of all upon the politics and trying to subordinate the political field to moral principles.

In this respect, the Group for Social Dialogue, gathering former dissidents or nonmainstream recognized intellectual leaders such as Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Plesu functioned as a gratification instance and source of personal and public confirmation (Gheorghiu, 2005; Răduță, 2005). Similarly, members of the Writers' Union, fighting for literary autonomy and opposing the ideological control of the literary field by the Communist Party, formed another influence group. Affiliations to these groups provided thereby the preconditions for acceptance within its own field of production – a sort of professional and moral “passport” regulating the social mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. Not being validated by these (politically pre-oriented) “moral” authorities meant risking access to the resources of professional recognition and ultimately total professional failure. But the decomposition of the literary field under the pressure of market economy and the suddenly diminished social prestige of writers subverted the autonomy of literary institution and made it vulnerable to external influence.

This is the way intellectual field started to function as a regulatory and legitimizing space for writers' everyday practices (like publishing or gaining appreciation), through its power to produce the criteria for public recognition and thus for symbolic inclusion and exclusion. Hence, if at first the literary field oppositions set the tone of public cultural debates, in time an increasingly politicized intellectual field tended to become the main instance of authority justifying or empowering publicly expressed opinions. Literary autonomy had to confront again, in different forms, the intrusion of ideology; a politicized cultural field started to be again organized by political divisions.

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