LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE TRANSITION ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract. *The purpose of this paper is to analyze the evolution of the higher education system in the transition period of Romania, by using a contingency approach combined with change dynamics. This post communist transition, which actually happened in all the European former communist countries, represents a quite new and unique historical construct and it can be characterized by some generic aspects and many other specific developments for each country. Since universities represent core public institutions, their reform is strongly related to the governmental strategy and the evolution of all the political, social, economical, technological and ethical aspects during transition. Our analysis show a very slow transition process from the socialist management pattern to the present democratic management pattern, due to strong inertial forces and to a chronic governmental ignorance of the change dynamics.*

Key words: academic leadership, Bologna process, closed system model, higher education, strategic management, transition, university management.

1. Introduction

The Higher Education System (HES) contains all accredited institutions of higher education, regardless of their structure and profile. In Romania, before 1989 there were two kind of higher education institutions: colleges and universities. The first kind of institutions offered three years programs, and the universities offered four or five years programs. Immediately after the changing of the political regime, all higher education institutions became by law universities. Due to their essential role in knowledge acquisition, generation, transfer and diffusion, and in cultural value preservation, universities represent core institutions of any country (Bok, 1990; Duderstadt, 2000; Jongbloed, Maassen and Neave, 1999; Winckler, 2007). Changing the political, economical, social and cultural environment in the postsocialist transition put a high pressure on HES to transform itself. According to the boundary value theory, this transformation depends on the dynamics at the interface of the system between the internal field of forces and the external field of forces. According to the change dynamics theory, within HES transformation processes depend on the balance between the change promoters and the inertial forces (Burnes, 1996; Darwin, Johnson and McAuley, 2002).

In this complex historical transition, hundreds of higher education institutions in tens of countries were challenged to: "*change their governance and management structures to more democratic ones that would allow more autonomous behaviour; change their curricula to match the transformation from socialist economies to market economies; change their mission from mainly teaching oriented to incorporate*

research; *and compete with a new sector of private higher education institutions of varying kinds"* (Westerheijden and Sorensen, 1999, pp.13-14). However, changing HES proved to be much more difficult than many people would expect, due to the conservative nature and the intrinsic stability of the system. Also, the composition of the system is heavily based on state universities and thus, its evolution depends on the governmental funding. At the limit, one may say that the very small budget allocation for education during these years of transition contributed heavily to decreasing performances and generating many strong resistances change.

For the Romanian HES there were three major challenges: adaptation to the new market economy, integration in the European Area of Higher Education through the Bologna process, and upgradation of its leadership and management to a knowledge society. "*Given its traditional role in handling, transfer and production of knowledge, it is obvious that higher education is (or at least should be) a core social institution in our expanding knowledge and information society. If they fully want to live up to their role, higher educations will have to adapt to the needs of the knowledge and information society – without there needs being perfectly clear. The question is, whether the traditional strong adaptive power of higher education institutions is capable of this.*" (Jongbloed, Maassen and Neave, 1999, p.3)

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the evolution of the Romanian HES, beyond its survival, in order to satisfy the new requirements of this changing and highly competitive external environment during transition.

2. Transition

In any historical perspective one would like to perform this present analysis, we have to acknowledge the fact that the demise of socialism and communism in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries was the most important and dramatic change in the last half century. However, changing the political regime has been only the trigger for changing all aspects of the social, economical and cultural life of millions of people. Although we call this period of time a *transition*, it is not actually a transition since nobody knows its final stage. Defining this final stage as *capitalism* or *market economy* it is very fuzzy and hard to evaluate. In science, we define *transition* as being the evolution of a given system in between two known and stable states, called generically the *initial* and the *final* states.

In order to define the initial stage, we have to look up to a common background for all the former socialist countries and then, for some specific elements of each country. The common heritage of socialism implied that all countries in the region began their transition with a production system based on the command-and-control economy, without any exposure to the competitive business environment. Also, in all of these countries, the management process has been put under the communist party's authority in each organization, such that the decision making process to depend heavily on the political leaders. In Romania, the political regime was under a severe dictatorship, and all aspects of economical, social and cultural life

have been restricted to a survival existence. The educational system has been over centralized and all important decisions were made at the ministry level. University management had a purely administrative nature and the academic leadership did not exist at all. A mechanical existence and a total obedience were the main characteristics of this unbelievable situation, which became the initial state for the transition process.

If the initial state is well known for each country, the final state has never been defined by the new political leaders in any institutional form. Actually, there is no single or unique form of *capitalism* or *market economy* to be considered as a final destination in our transition, and there is not any proven scenario to follow in this journey. We face a quite new historical process to re-integrate ourselves into the western countries way of life and way of thinking after about fifty years of such a disastrous political, social and economical experiment. Since the American capitalism has dominated economic thinking, "*economists tend to be overconfident about exporting capitalism to other countries. Some think that exporting American law and institutions is sufficient to make capitalism blossom instantaneously. It worked for the United States, why shouldn't it work for other countries? For this reason, economists has typically been oblivious to the political preconditions for the development of capitalism*" (Rajan and Zingales, 2007, p.1). Thus, importing American capitalism is not going to work since there is a totally different historical framework and initial state. Yet, we navigate in time toward capitalism and a free market economy, without knowing the precise coordinates of the final state. Our transition has not a clear target and a well defined direction of progress. In this context, any evaluation of the change process can be done only with respect to the initial state and less with respect to the final state of transition. Also, it remains the problem of change gradient, or the reform speed of implementation.

In his debatable book *The road to a free economy. Shifting from a socialist system: The example of Hungary* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1990), J. Kornai put forward several possible scenarios for this transition economy. One of the most critical problem of that time was the ownership reform. The book supported the idea of creation of an economic system in which private ownership would dominate. However, this idea left open the question of which is the best road to creating such a system. Two main strategies have been formulated: strategy A – organic privatization, and strategy B – accelerated privatization. Actually, the first one was in concordance with the *gradualism* approach, while the second one with the *shock therapy* approach. Hungary and Poland followed strategy A. In Hungary, hundreds of thousands of small and medium-sized firms were created, and a start was made to consolidate the banking sector. The strong inflow of capital was one of the main factors responsible for the improvement in Hungary's productivity and export performance (Konrai, 2000). On the other hand, in Czechoslovakia strategy B was applied. In the first phase the assets of state-owned enterprises were dispersed among million of voucher owners, but they were soon concentrated among investment funds. These funds lacked the capital to develop the backward companies. Moreover, the funds were closely linked to the large commercial banks, which were dominated or owned by the state.

In Romania, there was an attempt of implementing strategy B in the beginning of transition, but the reaction of the inertial political forces was so strong that the transition followed the road of balancing slowly the change forces with the resistance forces. Also, since changes in the way of thinking take time the shock therapy could hardly had any sustainable success. An interesting adverse phenomenon happened. Because the winners from early stages of liberalization and privatization – typically those who enjoyed control over state assets and close ties with the political elite – opposed reforms that could erode their initial gains. Such reforms would include further trade liberalization, measures to facilitate the entry of new domestic and foreign competitors, and legislation to protect the entrepreneurs (Hirschler, 2002).

In a paper prepared for the World Bank Annual Conference, J. Kornai (2000) analyzed the past ten years of transition with respect to his former proposed strategies. His conclusion was that "*Transition from socialism to capitalism has to be an organic development. Transition is a curious amalgam of revolution and evolution, a trial-and-error process in which old institutions are either retained or liquidated, new ones tested and accepted or rejected. Different elements in the process may be very rapid, fairly rapid, or slow. Each has its own appropriate speed. Some changes call for one-stroke intervention; many others advance by incremental changes. There are more important criteria than speed….So the emphasis has to be placed on consolidation and stability, and at the same time, on sustainability of growth, not on breaking records with it.*"(Kornai, 2000, p.25).

At January 1, 2007 Romania has been accepted as a member state of the European Union. This means a formal recognition from the European states that we developed a functional free market. The truth is that we put some significant distance to the initial state of a socialist fully controlled market, yet political forces are still powerful in shaping the economic legislation and governmental decisions such that the market to answer preferentially to some groups of interests.

3. The inertial stage

The impact on HES of the political earthquake in December 1989 contributed to several important changes. First, the social pressure requested a significant increase in the number of students admitted to universities. This increase has been operated by changing the status of the former three years colleges into full universities, and by increasing the number of students in classical universities. Before 1989, in Romania there was a highly disproportionate number of students in technical universities by comparison with classical and economical universities. Since the new market economy needed more economists than engineers, there was a dramatic reduction of number of students in engineering and an exponential increase in the number of students in economics and law. To compensate for the market deficit, some private universities started to offer programs in these fields, although there was no legislation for this new type of university ownership. Secondly, students requested breaking down the system of compulsory assignments of governmental jobs after their graduation. Although this

was a measure in concordance with the free market economy labour philosophy, the first years of its implementation generated a tremendous chaos. Thirdly, the Ministry of Education lost its full power in decision making and universities have been granted partially the power of designing their own curricula. Since the former law of education was not substituted immediately with a new one, and everybody contested the old regime, there was a period of chaos and ad-hoc decision making in which the whole HES was functioning due to its *inertial forces* represented primarily by professors and traditions.

The sudden transformation of the 16 colleges into full status university created serious problems from management point of view. Each of these small institutions wanted to develop overnight by increasing the number of university programs offered, regardless of a chronic lack of adequate faculty staff. It was a time when promotion of professors was done very easily within these new universities, with serious negative consequences later on. Also, the management of these new universities was not enough prepared to handle all problems generated by increasing the number of university programs and students within given premises with insufficient classrooms, laboratory equipments and qualified professors.

The disruption of the old HES lead to a new process of building up the university autonomy and a new power relation between the Ministry of Education and the university management. It started a process of decentralization, although it was very difficult for all the ministry bureaucrats to accept loosing their decision making power. First, there were free elections in faculties and universities and none of them have been controlled anymore by the structures of the communist party and the ministry. However, the revolution wave and lack of any performance values lead to new deans and rectors without any management talent or experience. There were a couple of years when all valuable professors for having managerial responsibilities were turned down due to their previous party involvement. Real academic values and managerial capabilities were substituted by contextual frustrated people. Most managerial decisions were made arbitrarily and the quality of education decreased substantially. Many excellent professors left for better paid jobs, and the best graduates left for universities abroad. There was a painful process of brain drain, accelerated dramatically by the mediocrity of the academic management. If we would like to consider all of this process a *creative destruction*, then we must say that creative component was extremely small by comparison with the destruction component.

The main issue with this transition period of time which rarely is addressed by analysts is that socialism and capitalism have different sets of cultural values and ways of thinking. However, the construction of a new set of cultural values and reshaping the way of thinking about education and life require time and a clear vision of the final stage of transition. Since we did not have had a well defined target and many of us are carriers of the old set of values, many useful changes in the educational system could not just happen. Also, the incremental change strategy adopted by the political leaders

lead to a gradual adaptation of HES and not to a reengineering process, which could have been much more adequate.

However, this legislative vacuum created opportunities for few rectors to adopt some entrepreneurial measures and to develop their universities according to European universities best practices. They were actually true leaders for their institutions and used their international previous experience to enrich the Romanian academic leadership. As an outstanding example we can mention here the "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj Napoca, which started in 1989 with about 3500 students, and now it has over 40000 students, and the most complex academic structure offering full university programs in Romanian, German and Hungarian languages. Many of these programs have already received international evaluation.

4. The new legislation stage

Lack of a new and adequate legislation generated some abnormal situations. Many new profit making enterprises called themselves *universities*, although they lack necessary infrastructure and human resources. The quality of their programs was far from acceptable and their business was based mainly on selling illusions of diplomas. As a result of this unprecedented situation, the Parliament passed the Law no.88/1993 for accreditation of higher education institutions and diploma recognition. According to this new legislation, higher education institutions can become universities by law as a result of an evaluation and accreditation process. They cannot be profit making companies. The procedure for the academic evaluation and accreditation is based on a set of general criteria and standards. For each criterion there are standards which show the minimum compulsory levels for the process of evaluation and accreditation. The procedure contains two stages: authorization and accreditation. The first stage of authorization allows to a new program to start, i.e. to organize by the respective institution an admission examination of candidates. The second stage allows the institution to organize graduation examinations and to yield diplomas to graduates. Thus, for a new institution, the most important result is to obtain accreditation for its study programs which leads to its accreditation as a university. According to this law, the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation has been established in order to implement all necessary procedures and to perform with help of specialized commissions the evaluation and accreditation processes. This law has been in operation until 2005, when it has been substituted with another one.

In 1995 the Parliament passed the Law no.84 – *The law of education*. This new legislation defines the concept of *university autonomy* and establishes the main *structures* and *functions* for universities and their management. In the same time, it defines the main responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and the new hierarchical relations between the ministry and universities. From a monopolistic and supercentralized institution the Ministry of Education became the strategic authority, leaving the university management to find solutions for the operational problems. Actually, this has been the spirit of the new legislation. In fact, the distribution of the

decision power between the Ministry of Education and universities was not clearly defined, and the law left enough room for inertial forces to continue their overall control. The university autonomy has three main dimensions: curricular, financial and managerial. From curricular point of view, each university received full decision making power to design the content of their academic programs in accordance with the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation standards and procedures. Although these standards have been conceived rather inflexible, there was enough room for promoting new ideas and improving by comparison with the socialist situation. Leading universities became actually promoters of new programs and new field of studies.

The *Law of education* contributed in a substantial way to unfreeze an old organizational culture and to open the way to a change in the university management and to have a dialogue between the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions. The progress of change was developing very slowly in comparison with the social needs, but it was well defined process. The organizational development took place especially within those universities offering programs in economics, law and humanities, because these were underdeveloped fields of studies before 1989. On the other hand, technical universities decreased after 1989 both in importance and in number of students due to a broken industry. It was a real need for these universities to adapt quickly to the new market economy demands and to integrate new trends in their study programs, taking advantage of this new legislation. However, this fact was not so easy to be done especially due to a strong organizational culture and to resistance built in by old professors, afraid of loosing their status. In the same time, the best graduates of these technical universities left the country. Thus, the quality of those willing to remain in university for academic careers decreased very much. Combined effects contributed to decline of the organizational culture and management performance and to a penetration upward of a certain mediocrity.

The third dimension of the university autonomy concept introduced by the *Law of education* refers to the financing mechanisms of higher education institutions. These mechanisms are based on two principles: there are no tuition and fees for students, and the amount of funding is directly related to the number of specific faculty staff: professors, associate professors, assistant professors, assistants, technical and administrative positions. Each faculty staff has a given *norm* to be perform and the sum of all these norms will give the level of funding. Beyond this arithmetic there were some lump sum money for new investments in infrastructures, especially for the new developing universities. However, the funding decisions remained in the power of the Ministry of education and the Ministry of Public Finances. They have been easily influenced by political reasons and links, transforming this dimension of the university autonomy into a real restriction for the financial management. There were no correlations with the number of students and their needs, and no requirements for the quality of the university programs. Powerful rectors due to their political connections, and not due to their leadership traits, could obtained more money then others. Thus, the *Law of education* introduced the concept of university autonomy but only partially.

It has been open only to improving academic curricula and a little bit of the management process. From the financial point of view, the new legislation kept all the power at the governmental level. The management process has been severely restricted to obeying the centralized procedures and rules. Deans and rectors became academic administrators without any real freedom and incentive to change the system.

5. The reform stage

During the period of December 1997-December 2000, a new team took the responsibility of the Ministry of Education under the leadership of minister Andrei Marga. It brought in a new vision for the higher education reform, based on (Marga, 2000a):

- A thorough analysis of the state of education in Romania, performed by a group of specialists, with emphasis on the directions and steps necessary to be done in order to improve it organically.
- Conceiving a dynamic equilibrium between universities and the new social, political, economical and technological environment. That means to take into consideration not only all the changes produced so far in these fields, but also to predict new possible environmental changes and to think the way for a continuous adjustment to them.
- Valuable international academic experience of each member of the new team ministerial team. This experience was very important to understand many changes produced in these last years in Europe and some other countries in higher education and to consider the main trends of these changes for our higher education reform.

This new team defined a series of short term and long term objectives and developed adequate strategies to obtain them. The most important short term objective was to end the transition reform defined with respect to general reform of the Romanian transition. In other words, the process of higher education reform has been projected into two different reference systems: a general reform process within the country, and a new European reform initiated through the Bologna declaration. The Romanian higher education reform must be coherent first with the general transition within the country, and then it should be comparable and compatible with what happens in Europe and throughout the world in academic life.

Among the long term objectives the most important one is the strategic reform of higher education taking into consideration the integration process of Romania in the European Union. This process started with the country accession at January 1, 2007 but in will last until our institutions and the economical development will match the union parameters. From HES point of view we were interested in signing the Bologna declaration (1999) and becoming part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In this international context, the main long term objectives for the Romanian higher education reform were the following:

- Generalizing the European Credit Transferable System (ECTS) in all universities. This new evaluation metric has been implemented in the beginning only in those universities were TEMPUS programs have been obtained.
- Changing the *financing mechanism* of universities based on the concept of *equivalent student* for the teaching activity, and based on proposed programs for institutional development and research activities. This means a very important transition from an arbitrary decision making system based on tradition and the number of faculty staff of each university to an algorithmic process based on a mathematical model which has been developed by the National Council for Financing the Higher Education institutions and approved by the Ministry of Education. This new financing mechanism is based on the concept of *equivalent student* and it is centred on students, not on professor norms.
- Implementing *strategic management* in our universities and elaboration of strategic plans for institutional development. Actually, this objective is strongly related to the previous one since the implementation of the new financial mechanism cannot be done without having elaborated strategic plans for universities. Thus, it has been necessary to establish first the structure of these plans and then to yield the norms by which the Ministry of Education could evaluate and judge them.

Strategic management has been developed in business in the last two decades as a result of the dynamic and turbulent changes produced within the external environment of any company (David, 2007; Wheelen and Hunger, 2008). Strategic management differs from the operational management especially due to its projection in time. All strategies are designed to achieve strategic objectives in 4-5 years. The main purpose of any organization is not anymore related strictly to profit maximization or to achieve some local targets. It is related to obtain a good positioning in the overall competition, able to yield a competitive advantage. Thus, in strategic management we need a clear vision, mission and formulation of some really important strategic objectives. For the Romanian universities this long term thinking is quite new and needs time to be accepted and used efficiently. The whole process is structured in the *strategic plan*, which is an instrument for leading the university for a period of time of four years, and the official document used in negotiating the institutional contract with the ministry for financing the educational process. Elaborating and implementing a strategic plan requires a new way of thinking academic management, in which there are strategic objectives, strategies and metrics of evaluating final results. The first efforts to implement strategic management in our universities have been done in 1998-2000, together with changing the financing mechanisms. In order to implement these major changes in HES some modifications in the *Law of education* have to be performed. It is interesting to remark the fact that implementing strategic management lead to visible changes in the attitudes of deans and rectors, from a passive and reactive

attitude to an active and pro-active attitude. Also, the election procedures requested now that each candidate to a leading position in the university functional structure (i.e. head of department, dean of faculty, rector) to present and defend a strategic plan in front of those eligible people to vote them. This requirement contributes to develop the leadership dimension in the university management, since it is related to the vision capability of any leader. Changes are slowly, but interesting enough to stress the difference with respect to the passive administrative model of academic management performed so far.

A critical analysis of the reform progress shows that after about ten years of transition the inertial forces and the change promoting forces became almost equal. However, the change forces overcome resistances in the field of academic curriculum, but lost in the battle for improving the university governance and the financial management. Although there were significant efforts from the Ministry of Education for decentralization, at the university level the critical mass has not been obtained yet for developing a real academic management based on open competition and leadership. Administrative positions are still very powerful with respect to real academic values, and managerial authority is overcoming research leadership. The field forces analysis of change process shows the need for promoting competition as an engine for pushing up the real academic and managerial values, and the need for new cultural values in concordance with a market economy.

6. The Bologna process

The management transition in the Romanian university system is strongly related to the Bologna process (1999). On June 19, 1999, one year after the *Sorbonne Declaration*, ministers responsible for higher education from 29 European countries signed the *Bologna Declaration*. They agreed upon important joint objectives for the development of a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area by 2010. The follow-up conferences have been held in Prague (May 2001), Berlin (September 2003), Bergen (May 2005), and London (May 2007). The next and final meeting will be hosted by the Benelux countries in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve on 28-29 April 2009.

As it is stressed in this *Bologna Declaration*: "*A Europe of knowledge is now widely recognized as an irreplaceable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competencies to face the challenges of the new millennium together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space"*. Beyond this political vision, it is evidently that implementing all the document actions at the level of universities will require a significant change in the university leadership and management. Creating EHEA is based actually on developing further the university autonomy and on increasing the leadership and management performance. Also, it is necessary to integrate in the new university strategic management a quality management component able to deal with new requirements concerning quality assessment of all

aspects of academic life. Bologna action lines, as they have been defined in a sequence of events, can be summarized as follows (Bratianu, 2005):

1. adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
2. adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles;
3. establishment of a system of credits;
4. promotion of mobility;
5. promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
6. promotion of the European dimension in higher education.

Three more actions have been introduced in the *Prague Communique*:

7. lifelong learning;
8. higher education institutions and students;
9. promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA.

A tenth action line has been introduced in the *Berlin Communique*:

10. doctoral studies and the synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

As the process of creating EHEA has been developing, action lines have tended to overlap or merge and new concepts have been introduced. Thus, the system of two degree cycles from Bologna (i.e. action line 2) was supplemented by a third cycle (i.e. action line 10) in Berlin conference. In the same time, action lines 1, 2, 3 and an important part of 10 may now be described within the framework of qualifications for higher education.

General framework of qualifications that may span both higher education and vocational education and training, and also possibly other parts of the educational system. Establishing an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA will be essential also for action line 6, i.e. the European dimension. A concept formulated implicit in action lines 1 and 4 has turned out to be central to the Bologna process: recognition of degrees and study periods. The legal instrument in this respect is the Lisbon Recognition Convention which states that all States party to the Convention shall recognize degrees and study periods in their own systems, provided there are no substantial differences. Action line 5 – promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance – has been central in the follow-up after Berlin. With the developed of an agreed set of standards and guidelines for quality assurance, a common basis for recognition is introduced.

Action line 8 initiated after Prague conference put into discussion the concept of higher education as a public good and public responsibility. The public responsibility for higher education encompasses the structural elements of the Bologna process such as a national framework, degree structure, quality assurance and diplomas recognition. The public responsibility for the structure of higher education is defined in all countries by national legislation. These actions lines have been very important for the progress of the Bologna process, but they should not be interpreted as final descriptions for the EHEA, which is actually the main outcome of this process. The action lines have shown the directions to go, but they did not explicitly define the final goals.

Romania has made major steps towards integration in EHEA by reorganizing the entire spectrum of university programs. A new structure of the higher education cycles has been adopted following the discussion that occurred within the National Rectors Council in November 2003 which have shown a general consensus regarding the adoption of this structure. In this context, the Parliament passed the Law no.288/2004 which stipulates the restructuring of university studies in three cycles: Bachelor (180-240 ECTS), Master (90-120 ECTS), and Doctorate (no ECTS metric). This new structure changed also the spectrum of management functions and responsibilities within the faculties and universities, increasing the incentives of deans and rectors for new ideas and new ways of improving teaching and research processes. However, their range of action is severely limited by the financial governmental procedures and by the *Law of education.* Although there is an evident need for a new legislation in concordance with the Bologna process, due to some political reasons this new vision for higher education has been systematically delayed.

According to the boundary value theory, the Bologna process is acting at the interface between the Romanian Higher Education and the European Higher Education through the decisions taken during the ministers meetings. These decisions contain value for the changing boundary conditions and rates of change. Although the Ministry of Education made some efforts to keep up with assumed responsibilities, due to interplay between the Government, the Parliament and the National Council of Rectors many decisions have been delayed or implemented only partially. We did change the structure of the whole HES according to the Bologna action lines, yet we lag behind from management and leadership point of view. Also, we lag behind in developing a real quality assurance system and an adequate quality culture in our universities. Another dimension in which things are moving very slowly is the research management and involvement more strongly in the research European programs and grants.

7. Academic leadership

In the initial stage of this transition there was no leadership in our universities. Using the psychological hallo effect, the socialism regime used to promote as rectors professors with a high scientific visibility, and a known obedient attitude toward political leaders. In this way the Ministry of Education created the illusion of academic leadership, although it is well known that scientific traits cannot substitute leadership traits. In the same time, the quasi-static environment and the over centralized HES allowed no room for a true leadership attitude. When the first rigid chains of command-and-control between the Ministry of Education and universities have been broken in this transition, there were created some limited conditions for leadership. However, the lack of necessary vision and leadership traits for the most rectors and deans of that time produced no effects, with very few exceptions. In a critical analysis we may say that those opportunities have been lost from academic leadership point of view. An important contribution to this situation had the

organizational culture developed in our universities during the 50 years of socialism, a culture built to suppress any attempt of leadership development. The explanation is very simple because political leaders were afraid of true academic personalities with vision and leadership qualities.

Unfortunately, the organizational culture not only resisted to change, but it continued to be under the political influence, especially in those universities where rectors, deans or simple professors are active members in different political parties and some of them have important positions in those parties and in the Parliament. This fact generated many negative consequences, among them being the strengthening political influence upon the whole academic life and development. Lack of competition and any performance criteria, while the political influence remains strong enough lead necessarily to an organizational culture of mediocrity, which opposes naturally the leadership idea.

Although many people would not recognize, the actual *Law of education* is against promoting values and leadership in the university management. It says that the department head must be elected from within his/her department by vote. Thus, all members of a department participate in the election of its head, and the candidates must be only from them. It is forbidden for anybody from outside of that department to candidate for the leading position. In the same way, the dean of a faculty is elected only from within that faculty, and the rector of any university can be elected only from within that university. In conclusion, from election point of view, universities are considered to be *closed systems*. That means the worst situation, since there is actually no competition. This idea of the closed system contributed directly in promoting mediocre people in leading positions, and in eliminating any possibility of real competition for finding true academic leaders. Although this rule constitutes the main barrier in improving the university management in our university, it is still in operation due to the reaction of the mediocre organizational culture and to political interests of having obedient people and not real leaders in our universities.

There is a strong need for the government to put forward a new legislation for HES, in which all the managerial positions within a university to be obtained through an open competition, based on leadership principles and leader traits. Life sciences demonstrated that closed systems are dead systems, unable to evaluate and to adapt to any change in the external economic and social environment. There is no way to be competitive on the European market with closed managerial systems. Although all these above arguments are clear and speak for themselves, it is a sad reality the fact that none of the political leaders who took the office in the Ministry of Education did not understand the need for a new approach in our university leadership and management.

The European University Association (EUA) is supporting the Bologna process and promotes the idea of leadership and innovation in the academic management. In the recent Lisbon Declaration *Europe's universities beyond 2010: diversity with a common purpose*, EUA stressed the need for more developed university autonomy and leadership: "*Governments are urged to endorse the principle*

of institutional autonomy so as to accommodate diverse institutional missions and to include academic autonomy (curricula, programs and research) financial autonomy (lump sum budgeting), organizational autonomy (the structure of the university) and staffing autonomy (responsibility for recruitment, salaries and promotion). Autonomy should be founded on adequate public funding and should also facilitate the strategic management of public and private income and endorsements (from philanthropists, companies, alumni and students) by the universities themselves. Governments are urged to benchmark progress against target levels set in relation to both autonomy and funding of universities. Universities will strive to reinforce further leadership and strengthen professional management"(Lisbon Declaration, 2007, p.6).

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

Finally, we shall consider the American experience in governance and leadership of universities. Although the diversity of such an experience is huge and it is really very hard to extract common principles, it is clear that leadership plays a critical role in university, just as it does in other social institutions. "*If we examine carefully any major accomplishment of a university – the quality of its faculty and students, the excellence of a program, its impact on society – invariably we will find a committed, forceful, visionary, and effective leader. Leadership is dispersed throughout academic institutions, through department chair and program directors, deans and executives officers, and influencial leaders of the faculty and the student body. However, in most institutions, both the responsibility and authority of leadership flow from the top of the organizational pyramid, from the president and the governing board of the university"* (Duderstadt, 2000, p.249). These conclusions belong to J. Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, one of the most prestigious American universities.

8. Conclusions

Leadership and management in higher education experienced an irreversible transformation in Romania in this transition period of time. From an initial passive and purely administrative attitude, the university management followed very slowly the fuzzy road of the transition, in order to cope with increased competitive and a

changing environment. The accession of Romania in European Union and the integration of the Romanian higher education in the Bologna process put forward new requirements for the university management and the specific legislation supporting it. In this new context, according to the boundary value theory and the change dynamics theory there is a tremendous need for a new legislation, able to break down the closed system barriers and to promote academic leadership.

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