

**THE DYNAMICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN
ROMANIA
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE RELATIONSHIP
OF
TERRITORIAL CENTRALIZATION-
DECENTRALIZATION**

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Abstract

Centralization is of course necessary and useful within certain limits and times. Limiting equality and freedom, excess centralization obviously has negative effects. Among these negative effects can be mentioned: "the stimulation of bureaucracy by emphasizing statuses and roles, the support of a rigid, albeit humiliating, hierarchy, but especially through the cult of the leader. Emphasizing

the elements of subordination and dominance causes social imbalance, generating conflicts" (Strungă, 2002, p. 111).

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1. Social-political and territorial centralization-decentralization. The effects of territorial centralization of higher education

We could understand by the territorial centralization of higher education the concentration (increase in the number) of university students and teaching staff in the capital of a state or in a few larger cities.

At the opposite pole, decentralization implies a balanced distribution of the university population in as many localities as possible in different areas, located as far as possible from the capital.

Territorial centralization, in general, correlates with the social-political centralization of the latter, determining the concentration of the decision by a limited number of people. In extreme cases, the Communist or Nazi regimes of the 20th century, centralization becomes totalitarianism: a single dictator rules over all citizens in almost all areas and issues.

Territorial centralization facilitates decision-making centralization. The more and closer the subordinates, the more effective the control. If the subordinates are more scattered and at a greater distance, the decision is more difficult and the supervision is weaker.

Although at first sight centralization is necessary and logical, a sign of modernization and brings certain advantages, a deeper analysis demonstrates that excess centralization seriously affects democracy, freedom, equality, culture, education and even social-economic progress.

If in the 19th century, analyzing the excessive centralization tendencies, Alexis de Tocqueville "came to the conclusion that France's lagging behind England, in the second half of the 18th century, in terms of agriculture and trade were mainly due to the high degree of centralization of the French monarchy, compared to the multiple freedoms and facilities offered by British legislation" (Strungă, 2003, p. 131).

The social and political problems of centralization have been meticulously analyzed through the concentric circles of power model (Wallenstein, 1974) of the analysis between center and power, including marginality (Faric and Lemnitz, 1947, etc.). More recently, Janos Hickel reveals the disastrous effects of centralization and division resulting in inequality: wealth in the center and poverty in the rest. (Hickel, 2017).

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Centralization of education is usually a consequence of socio-political centralization. Authoritarianism of communist origin does not disappear so easily from Romania. Adrian Miroiu, for example, found helplessly in 1997 that Romanian education is hyper-centralized and hyper-hierarchized. "The organization of our Education would be based on the principle according to which those from the lower level are infantilized and treated as acephalous, in the absence of the head of command". (Miroiu, 1997, p. 63). The same author observes that Romanian education works based on of an "inflexible hierarchy"

outside the "head of command" subordinate to him are "territorial satraps" such as county school inspectorates.

Directly referring to higher education, Lazăr Vlăsceanu appreciates that it "came to be almost completely centralized financially and managerially, operating under the undisguised control of relevant officials". (Vlăsceanu, 2020, p. 218).

The same phenomenon can be observed in the field of higher education, decision-making centralization prefers territorial centralization and hence the tendency to agglomerate students and teaching staff in a few large university centers.

The excessive centralization of higher education causes imbalance, in the sense that a large part of the country's territory is occupied by higher education institutions. Young people from disadvantaged areas are forced to move to university centers that are sometimes far away, under the conditions of a deficient infrastructure. "We consider not only the expenses, but also the physical or mental effort required to adapt to another locality. In fact, in the conditions of generalized poverty in Romania, most of the young people from less favored university areas do not have adequate financial resources and are dependent on the faculties and freebies offered by the state. Another part of students gives up their studies or postpones them". (Strungă, 2002, p. 132).

On the other hand, it was observed that "the presence of a university in a county has not only beneficial economic or cultural effects. Demographically, it was found that the population of a city with a university is growing progressively". (Bădescu, Mihuț, Sunpe, 2018 apud Vlăsceanu, 2020, p. 198). It is true, however, that there is a danger of exaggerating and in the opposite direction.

2. Methodology

The present study is part of a panel research that began in 2001 and was completed in this first phase by publishing the work *Some aspects of the territorial centralization of Romanian education* (in the Annals of the West University, Timișoara, 2002, vol. XIV, pages 111-123). The data were collected from the Statistical Yearbooks. It is important to note that these yearbooks appear late. For the research carried out in 2020, they could only use data from the earliest academic year 2017/2018. For consistency, we have considered five consecutive academic years: for the first research: 1996/1991, 1997/1998, 1998/1999, 1999/2000, 2000/2001. (Strungă, 2002, pp. 114-122), and for this investigation: 2013/2014, 2014/2019, 2015/2016, 2016/20011, 2017/2018 (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).

N .	University Center	2013-2014	Perc ent	2014-2015	Perce nt.	2015-2016	Perce nt	2016-2017	Perce nt	2017-2018	Perce nt
1	București	128883	29.75	171065	31.58	170353	31.82	172038	32.36	176199	32.69
2	Cluj-Napoca	49597	11.45	65761	12.14	66534	12.43	67262	12.65	68391	12.69
3	Iași	44132	10.18	55220	10.19	54653	10.21	53174	10.19	53392	9.90
4	Timișoara	31544	7.28	39556	7.30	39564	7.39	40002	7.66	40692	7.55
5	Constanța	21700	5.00	24111	4.45	23892	4.46	23118	4.43	22374	4.15
6	Craiova	18383	4.28	22087	4.07	21687	4.07	21929	4.20	22339	4.16
7	Brașov	18123	4.24	21652	3.99	21366	3.99	21292	4.08	21516	3.99
8	Oradea	13499	3.11	16381	3.02	16144	3.02	15833	3.03	15971	2.96
9	Galați	11806	2.72	14747	2.72	14790	2.76	14141	2.71	14980	2.77
	Total	433234		541653		535218		531586		538871	

Table 1. Student Dynamics 2013-2018 (Statistical Annals of Romania)

N .	University Center	2013-2014	Percent	2014-2015	Percent.	2015-2016	Percent	2016-2017	Percent	2017-2018	Percent
1	București	9021	31.97	8790	31.29	8703	32.30	8732	32.80	8415	32.03

2	Cluj-Napoca	3858	13.67	3967	14.28	3817	14.16	3760	14.12	3806	14.49
3	Iași	2917	10.33	2893	10.41	2871	10.65	2818	10.58	2818	10.72
4	Timișoara	2533	9.04	2524	9.08	2412	8.95	2426	9.00	2422	9.22
5	Craiova	1328	4.70	1294	4.65	1261	4.67	1230	4.62	1238	4.71
6	Constanța	907	3.21	922	3.31	906	3.36	903	3.39	905	3.44
7	Brașov	878	3.11	864	3.11	786	2.91	772	2.90	774	2.94
8	Oradea	1247	4.42	1240	4.46	1098	4.07	1078	4.04	1055	4.01
9	Galați	637	2.25	635	2.25	628	2.33	684	2.56	635	2.41
	<i>Total</i>	28211		27772		26949		26618		26266	

Table 2. University Teaching Staff 2013-2018 (Statistical Annuals of Romania)

To simplify the analysis, only eight university centers were taken into account: Bucharest, Iasi, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Craiova, Brașov, Galați and Constanța. The selection of these centers was made in 2002 and was not modified in 2020. Throughout the investigation, we had numerous conversations with students, university teachers, specialists in educational sciences, politicians, etc. who guided our research path and conclusions. Based on the collected data, we compiled three tables: T1. Student dynamics, T2. Dynamics of teaching staff, T.3. Higher education in private institutions. For the convenience of interpreting the tables, we ordered the data in the form of rankings, with the size of the values as a criterion, thus obtaining a direct image of the degree of centralization. The rules established in the first phase of the panel research (2001-2002) were rigorously followed for the second phase (2019-2020). In the statistical processing of the data, we used two categories of indicators: that of the percentage weight of the university center, of the national total of PP(st) students and respectively of PP(ed) teaching staff. The second category of indices S/P (st) and S/P (ed) have a more intensive character, determining the ratio between the number of students and teaching staff in a university center and the population of the respective locality.

No.	University Center	Students	Percent	Teaching Staff	Percent
1.	București	39194	64.60	1402	55.18
2.	Arad	4141	6.83	348	13.70
3.	Galați	2715	4.47	59	2.32
4.	Cluj-Napoca	2488	4.10	278	10.94
5.	Constanța	2195	3.62	59	2.32
6.	Tg. Mureș	2069	3.41	47	1.85
7.	Timișoara	1850	3.05	86	3.38
8.	Oradea	1770	2.92	119	4.68
9.	Craiova	1478	2.44		0
10.	Brașov	1407	2.32		0
11.	Iași	1366	2.25	143	5.63
	<i>Total</i>	60673		2541	

Table 3. Private Higher Education in Romania 2017-2018 (Statistical Annuals of Romania)

3. Conclusions and proposals

We focused our attention primarily on the share of students from Bucharest, the capital of the state and the largest university center in the total number of students. We started from the worrying observation of professor Adrian Neculau that the share of the Bucharest's students went from 37.7% in 1989/1990 to 40.6% in 1995/1996. (Neculau, 1997, p. 46). It seems that Neculau's observation was a signal for the leaders of Romanian higher education.

In our first study we found that the share of students from the capital decreased from year to year but at a slow pace: 38.62% in 1996/1997, 37.79% in 1997/1998, 36.13% in 1988/1999, 33.48% in 1999/2000 and even 32.42% 2000/2001. (Strungă, 2002, p. 112).

It seems that our study, published in the Annals of the University of West Timișoara in 2002, had a certain effect, especially since we took care to disseminate the results, not only for teaching staff, researchers, but also for deputies and responsible factors (deans and rectors). From our recent research we found that the share of the capital's students had reached somewhere below 30%

(29.75%) in the 2013/2018 academic year, but it continued to grow, it is true, at a slow pace: 31.58% in 2014/2015, 31.82% in 2015/2016, 32.36% in 2016/2017 and 32.69% in 2017/2018 (see Table 1). The same phenomenon is also observed among the share of teachers in Bucharest: 31.97% in 2013/2014, 31.29% in 2014/2015, 32.30% in 2015/2016, 32.80% in 2016/2017 and 32.03% in 2017/2018. Not only Bucharest is involved in centralization, but also three other university centers: Cluj-Napoca, Iași, Timișoara, which gathered in 2017/2018: 14.49%, 10.72% and 9.22% respectively of the total teaching staff and 12.69%, 9.90%, 7.55% of the national total of students, i.e. 30.14% of students and 34.43% of teachers (the concentration is higher for teachers than for students), as it can be observed in Tables 1 and 2. If we take into account the population of the four university centers: about 3 million inhabitants and the total population of Romania, about 20 million inhabitants, then the S/P (st) ratio for it is 16.24% (162,475: 1 million) against of 8.8% (176,199: 2 millions) for Bucharest, from which it would result that the strength and capacity to attract students is greater in the three secondary university centers (see Table 1). S/P (st) ratio and for all four university centers is 11.29% (338,674: 3 mil) compared to S/P (st) = 0.0117 (200,133: 17 mil, see Table 1) and for the rest of the country's territory. The same concentration trends can be observed from the analysis of private education from the year 2017/2018. Bucharest has 39,194 students and is almost double the amount of students in the following 10 university centers (21,489, see Table no. 3). The analysis of private higher education in Romania offers suggestions for a possible decentralization. Leading positions, at the moment of the study, in the ranking of private university centers are occupied by: Arad with 4147 students, Constanta - 2895, Galati - 2715 and Oradea - 1770 (see Table no. 3).

Private institutions of higher education tend to compensate for the shortcomings arising from the excessive centralization of private higher

education by suggesting higher education centers that have potential for development.

Without proposing the development of educational policy programs regarding the decentralization of higher education in Romania, we nevertheless express our opinion that a firm action in this direction is necessary.

In our opinion, an optimal higher education in Romania should include three levels of centralization: Bucharest, of course, not with PP (st) of 30-40%, but only 20-25%, the three large university centers: Cluj- Napoca, Iasi, Timișoara, which could remain at 30% and another 30% could be completed by university centers with potential for decentralization such as: Constanța, Brașov, Galați, Craiova and Oradea, arranged geographically, in such a way as to compensate for the territorial imbalance.

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