EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

East-Central Europe is more than a piece of our renewed lesson in political geography. It is a part of Europe bound with economical, social and cultural ties. East-Central Europe's region of the Continent's worth to study and to understand.

The economical, social and cultural ties that keep territories, sub-regions, states and countries of the region together are routed in a common history. Closed down by Germany from the West, Russia from the North-East and the Ottomans from the South-East, the region was dominated by three empires. The present events that accompany the economical and political transitions of the former communist countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union are reflections of what happened to them after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the 18–19th centuries and the abolishing of the Habsburg Empire after the First World War.

That is the importance of the historico-political studies of the present transition in East-Central Europe. Most of the experts analyzing the on-going processes would not understand without knowing the traditions of forced modernization and the legacies of resistance in order to save cultural and political identities. Education, a complex phenomenon of social and cultural life is perhaps the best illustration of that modernizational ambiguity.

The aim of this column is twofold. It serves those who participate, in an active and intended way in the educational transition of the region with information about the neighbors. The circulation of information might brake up intellectual ghettos and perpetuate the transition as an element of the global process of modernization in Europe.

The column also provides scholars and experts with on-the-spot information about East-Central Europe. It gives the validity and the reliability of the statements and remarks they make on the on-going changes of East-Central Europe.

ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN TRANSITION

Curricular Patterns Before and After the Change

The aim of this article is to present a slice of contemporary history, to highlight developments that took place in an abruptly loosened up decisional system. Curricular changes are known to be incremental, grass-root innovations at the basic unit level of the higher

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education system. Our case study will present the probably rare situation when a very tight system collapsed overnight and made such possible developments.

As it happened with the need to expand or the need for disciplinary, renewal a period of rapid changes started as the academics saw the possibility to act on their own. This movement was indeed at the lowest level of the system, but can hardly be described as incremental. It is important to note that the overall image of the process resembles a typical stop-go movement, but differs in the fact that the accumulated problems of the "stop" period have not been solved, or tried to solve this central decision. The "go" period was determined directly by the actors at the basic level of the system.

The needs to change were caused by the political outdatedness in some disciplines, the accumulated frustrations of the teaching staff that could not bring their research interests in the curriculum, the long lasting curricular immobility and the need to find a closer contact to corresponding degree programs in the West.

Another important element in curricular matters represents a value crisis we will try to analyze in the following section.

Output and process oriented curricula

We can generally distinguish between output and process orientation in higher education. As a definition we will consider process orientation the emphasis on the learning, teaching and socialization process that takes place in the university rather than interest in the degree while output orientation concentrates on the results of education.

Naturally in the first case we can include programs that have no direct contact to a profession, while the second case consists of those programs that lead to a clear definition of the labor market the graduate is directed to. Of course there exists a certain similarity between this classification and the vocational-nonvocational dichotomy. We argue that this second distinction does not cover exactly the same range of problems, mainly because we consider the process or output orientation of programs rather than disciplines. We should be more explicit to evaluate the output orientation programs for non-vocational disciplines as well as vocational disciplines. As vocationalisation is usually seen as an impact on the discipline we consider the output orientation of a study program as a wider concept including internal, curricular elements as well as environmental ones, like the overall image of higher education in the masses. We hope to clarify the concept of the following paragraphs, effectively.

A certain link exists between output and process orientation as we see it and the practice of output and process control in higher education. Evidently they are linked in as much as certain control system that might influence the orientation of lots of study programs. And it is self evident that a system which favors the process orientation in most of the study programs in the universities, will strive to introduce a system of process control whether the output counts more naturally that the output should be monitored. Of course such considerations are rather simplification but they can help us in seeing the close link between the orientation in our vocabulary and the system control. This can also be seen as a partial justification of the chosen terms.

Even if vocationalisation is usually seen as an impact on the discipline we consider the output orientation of a study program as a wider concept including internal, curricular elements as well as environmental ones, like the overall image of higher education in the masses. We hope to clarify the concept even more in the following paragraphs, as well.

The following set of dichotomies might help to clarify the concepts.

emphasis on	process knowledge learning	output service practice
values	freedom scientific truth	loyalty practical adequacy
thinking	critical problem recognition	patterns problem solving
control	process	output

A very clear connection between our dichotomy and the traditional paradigms of the serving university and the knowledge university exists. The university serving the community, the *Bologna paradigm* of the university led by those interested in the results of education and the *Humboldtian paradigm* of the lonely scientist in the pursuit of truth that have along the history of higher education, the most important models represented, out of which practically all other classifications have emerged. We consider that even if from a contemporary point of view both of them would be types of process oriented higher education, output orientation has emerged as a development of the Bologna paradigm. The need to serve the community was actually the rationale of the Bologna university, even if this community was restricted by a small group of people that financed higher education. This has gone over in the need to serve the larger group that today financially supports higher education. The search for adequacy to the society is the clearest where it has turned to adequacy to the labor market. It is here that the output of the educational system gains superiority over the process of education.

We do not intend to question a superiority of any of these models, but can hopefully declare that both types of universities create a good environment to satisfy different clients of higher education.

The easiest way of distinguishing these types of higher education would be identified disciplinary cultures belonging to them. It is here that we get the closest of the vocation-nonvocation distinction. Of course engineering, medicine, etc. have output orientation while philosophy, sociology, etc. have process orientation study fields. But we would argue that the output orientation is not only a characteristic of the curricula, but also the hidden curricula, the socialization process in the university. They are also determined by a certain extent discipline, but can also be structurally determined by a direction of the higher education system in a certain way. One of the main features of the communist regime's higher education made a shift towards the output orientation in all disciplines. The creation of the intellectual proletariat had an important element in the educational policy of the former regime. The highly educated schools had to become just another input in the production process.

On a curricular level this had to mean a displacement of goals reducing the values of critical thinking and the pursuit of truth and directing all kinds of studies towards practical adequacy and direct usefulness. It should be stated that the adequacy was sought to a denatured society and economy. The needs of the centrally planned economy were not

regulated by a market but by political priorities. Degree programs are not directly linked to the economy, the influences have been even worse.

The graduates of any Romanian higher education institution prior to 1990 had to go through a period of compulsory employment after their studies at a workplace they were supposed to choose a rather short list prepared by the ministry.

Outside the higher education system a very well led propaganda campaign was so successful that higher education became, and still is, identified with institutions that produce doctors, teachers, engineers, economists and lawyers. This factory, like image of the university represented one of the major impacts in the role change of the higher education after World War II.

The Romanian prewar higher education had a very elitist system which wanted to offer access to few and had of course a traditional type of higher education mainly process oriented, even if certain elements of Napoleonian vocationalism could be traced. The expansion of higher education in the early 50's and later the severe cuts in disciplinary diversity in the mid 70's led to a 74% of students in engineering and agricultural disciplines by 1988. The rest, of course, included mainly the medicine, the economics and different types of teacher training. Lots of typical process oriented disciplines (social sciences, humanities, etc.) were reduced and kept under strict control. Others like economics, the pure sciences, etc. were reoriented to become output driven e.g. their goal became the preparation of teachers and clerks.

So, the development had three action lines: the curriculum, the change of views towards higher education at the level of the population and the structure of the higher educational system. This concentrated action led to the possible unique case in which whole national systems could be characterized by a single type of orientation.

The result of the general output orientation has been tragic, leading to extreme credentials and the loss of content of a large part of education. The necessary clarification of the value system has not yet taken place. Let us see how these curricular elements were controlled.

Before

Like all Central and East European countries, Romania has a fixed curriculum in higher education, very few optional and facultative courses being organized, and they mainly in the terminal years of each degree program. In the so-called real socialist period the curriculum was fixed by the central authorities practically no scene for negotiation being available to the academics. The level of standardization of the taught material was nevertheless variable. If at the social and political sciences as well as at philosophy centrally developed textbooks had to be presented, the other end of the spectrum, which included mostly the hard sciences, profited from the freedom of having to observe only the fixed titles of the courses. Even here the curriculum had to be send to the central authorities for approval before the start of the academic year. We could in fact highlight the continuum in which all the restrictions that were made by the central authority and this directly meant the ministry of Education. The continuum will have as important points as the following:

- fixed textbooks;
- fixed structure of the course;
- fixed title of the course.

It is also very important to note that this type of restrictions was in fact not correlated to any kind of quality control or quality assessment. The bounds themselves were supposed to produce the needed quality, even if it was not so. If we consider the matrix of disciplines along the dichotomies of hard-soft and pure-applied we will see that the tightness of the curricular bounds decreased from soft pure to soft applied and from hard applied to hard pure in a circular scheme.

The most evident restrictions could of course be sensed where the potential conflicts with the rules of the communist society were the most probable. As such not only disciplines that overly had to present contradicting theories, like the social sciences, but also those apt of creating a "too" strong critical appetite where kept under control. The totalitarian regime did not accept relativity of thought and reality.

All this led to a high level of uniformity in the higher education system, all degree programs in a subject discipline in any university in the country being supposed to offer the same courses. And this was mostly true. The deviation from the standard was small and can always put into his lectures. And academics always found a way to be a able to transmit some of their personal insights and findings. Again disciplinary differences were very big, along the same coordinates we have already traced. Very rarely and only at the hard pure sciences one could find courses which had completely different contents under the same title at different institutions. This was largely determined by the prestige and the position in the academic oligarchy of the respective professor.

The centrally developed curriculum had a very small pace of the change and was updating along with the changing knowledge base of the discipline. As such, the need for curricular developments was high not only because political problems were involved but also at the fields of knowledge with a fast development. In our case studies we tried to find typical situations also according to the different needs for the change.

The output orientation in curriculum distorted mainly the pure sciences, these being fewest adequate to such a view. They evolved in a kind of teacher training.

After

The curricular developments were the first to take place after the regime change. Before anything else happened, in the spring of 1990 curricular changes took place. The more structural changes in the higher education system had to wait for the beginning of the new academic year, the expansion of the system, the staff renewal and the disciplinary reorientation as well as the emergence of private higher education was started.

The first months of 1990 knew a very active students' movement meant to make the fast turn towards the new political system. Professors, politically active in the former regime and sometimes not only those, who were asked to leave the universities, the students formed new organizations, entered the senates of the universities and also tried to take an active part in the political life of the country. This very mobile scene was expressed on an interaction level by what we called a post-revolutionary psychosis.

On the other hand the new Minister of Education, *Mihail Sora*, a philosopher and a democratic activist, wanted to introduce a fast liberalization of the higher education system, announcing an immediate academic freedom and putting a basis for the university autonomy in scientific and educational matters. The financing system remained the same, but the state stepped back from all decisional structures, changing its role from dictating to

approving. All decisions were lowered at the institution, basic unit and even personal level and the central government approved in that period practically unconditionally. If the structural problems, like the *numerus clausus*, the disciplinary structure of the institutions, which mainly meant the expansion in number of students and study programs how decided to have the institutional level, curricular matters were interpreted to be a part of academic freedom and left at the disposal of the academics. If the institutional level needed a clear agreement from the ministry as their decisions had to be supported by financing, the curricular changes could freely take place as they needed as good as no increase in funding. It was a relatively long period before the changes of the curriculum was sent to the central authorities for the approval at the end of 1990. The ministry had no comments on those materials.

All these developments were not backed by a clear statement of goals or a change of values, the lines of output orientation being already well rooted in the value system of both academics and clientele. The link between the labor market and the higher education system that was built by the communist regime through manpower planning, an easy task in a centrally planned economy, collapsed much later. Academics did not foresee their curricular reforms; the need to relate less to the job perspectives of the graduates.

It was for the first time that the academics freely organized their teaching material and it happened by absolutely no outside interference. As the need for academic freedom was so highly rated that it was not even an intervention from the professors in the teaching material of their assistants. No structure of mutual balancing of the transmitted knowledge preexisted and such a no coordination between the academics took place. In the beginning, that is the second semester of the 1989/90 academic year, the names of the courses did not change even if the contents knew sometimes radical changes.

The general result of this chaotic system was a large amount of overlap, mainly at the introductory courses. It was only after a few weeks that the professors realized that the students received the same material maybe three times. If after a while the dispersion of knowledge grew on the account of the specialization in course material, it was at the first few courses that the academics, free to talk whatever they wanted to, repeated unwillingly the same information.

It did not last long before the students started to complain to the teachers and it was this selfregulating way that the university system received the input that something was wrong. The need for mutual adjustment appeared as evident and we thought that the way was implemented worth tracking back to the disciplinary cultures.

Another signal of dysfunction came even later as the labor market collapsed. A lot of recent graduates, mainly of technical disciplines could not find jobs in their specialization. The number of those seeking admissions at the technical universities decreased radically. At the same time a value of a nonspecific university degree appeared on the labor market of the newly developing private enterprise sector. Some computer literacy, foreign language knowledge and mostly learning skills and social adaptability were asked. It was clear that the universities had to produce more general skills, more critical thinking and less specialized knowledge. Some disciplines are less, some more confronted with these problems, but the trend is general.

It is paradoxical and worth noting that it was the output orientation itself that actually led to the reduction of specialization. The need to find a large degree of identification to the labor market was created in fact by the distortion not only of the higher education

system but also of the labor market through central planning. As the planned economy disappeared it was the permanent orientation towards it that enabled the higher education system to realize curricular change has to take place. Two patterns of reaction to these changes can be found. An "optimistic" view considers that there is no reason for a change in value system, what should be obtained is more adequacy to the new labor market. The other way of reaction considers higher education and should step back to the closed scientific world and should emphasize academic versus practical values. As these are spontaneous, free developments predictably the two above—mentioned patterns are correlated to disciplines. The sound output orientation of traditionally vocational disciplines emerges along with the change in focus toward process at the nonvocational disciplines. We could hope that the balance would be found as a result of the decentralization of decision making in curricular matters.

Disciplinary differences

This section was meant to find disciplinary patterns in the mutual adjustment processes as well as in the ways that the curriculum changed.

We focused on the way faculties reacted to dysfunction messages regarding curricular overlap at the introductory courses and the new setting of values. We have selected four fields of study in an increasing order of potential political importance and a decreasing order of formalization: physics, engineering, economics and history. We meant to have the study fields in a decreasing order of pace of change too, but if this is evident for engineering, economics and history, it is hard to decide where physics can be positioned versus engineering. The four cases can also be seen as emblematic for the continuum from hard pure to soft pure disciplines. Physics is currently the typical hard pure science. Engineering fields are all hard and applied, while history is evidently soft and pure. Economics include disciplines from hard applied (e.g. computer economics) to soft pure (e.g. economic doctrines) with operations research, banking, business studies, etc. in between.

When we started the comparative research on curricular adjustment in different disciplines, our hypothesis was that there exists a correlation between the formalization of the knowledge base and the formalization of adjustment processes. We hoped to find that the organizational base of faculties has come to reflect the typical disciplinary socialization. It turned out not to be so.

The second hypothesis has emerged after a closer study of engineering disciplines. We hoped to find a confirmation of the fact that the pace of change of the knowledge base could be correlated to the formalization of decisional processes. In such a case a rapidly changing discipline would be less formalized in its organization of faculty, while a relatively stable one would rely on more formal ways of the action. This either did not result from our investigation.

A certain pattern could be found in the motors of curricular change: hard pure sciences have changed mainly dew to a better input from research, hard and soft applied sciences have sought for more syncronicity to the Western curriculum of the disciplines, while soft sciences, both pure and applied, have suffered from the changes implied by the political and social environment. As the amount of the change is concerned, the applied sciences have changed the most, the current curriculum being very different from that before 1990, but even here the differences between the institutions are sometimes greater than those between the fields of study. In the motors of change we could see a clear correlation between the

level of political involvement, that is: where state control was minimal (hard pure sciences); changes were small, where it was economically oriented (applied sciences); changes came dew to the opening and the change of the economic environment; while where the control was clearly political the changes were also politically determined. We can so conclude that the changes have represented a step towards "normalization".

Another important element in the curricular change is represented by the very fast pace of the change that can currently be found in almost all disciplinary cultures, a reaction to the long lasting curricular immobility that existed before 1990.

Studying the adjustment processes came upon the result that no correlation between the disciplines and the adjustment methods exists. We encountered, regardless of discipline, both formal and informal adjustment processes, along with the negation of problems in some places.

It was noteworthy that the informal methods, coffee break talks and the rest have led to a better solution of the problems and to more common action than formal settings, meetings or committees. The overlap was eliminated practically in all places of our investigation, where it was addressed by the academics in one to one discussions, even if sometimes the delimitation of the territories between the courses is currently found as arbitrary. Where overlap was discussed in formal meetings of the teaching staff almost no results were obtained or it was simply found that it does not exist. The change in the level of the freedom to teach was led, in a pendulum way, to the fact that the academics do not want to talk about their teaching in any formal setting. We have to note how fast the curriculum became as "the business of academics" after being mostly out of their control.

The common reaction to the environment was mostly restricted to a structural change of the curriculum, better marketing of the institution and the creation of more attractive degree-programs. The inside-the-classroom changes, even if existence has not emerged from the adjustment or the common action of the academics, regardless of the disciplinary culture.

We tried to find the changes of the value system according to the process versus output orientation dichotomy. We found indeed that pure sciences (in our cases physics and history) are going to a clear path towards the process orientation. In the economics output-orientation has become even more evident as all of the study programs are currently changing through the focus from the economic sciences to business studies. The increasing labor market for the economists and all related profession has determined on a clear contact between the curriculum and the needs of the economy. In the engineering where the labor market is shrinking, the curriculum has emphasized more interdisciplinary. Some important examples are made by the introduction of compulsory management and marketing courses at lots of engineering programs. More emphasis was laid on foreign languages. The whole degree programs in foreign languages were launched. Currently there are 10 degree programs in English, 12 in French and 6 in German in different Technical Universities throughout the country. Courses in social sciences and even humanities have become available to students in engineering to offer a more general preparation. They all might seem a reduction of the output orientation are in fact only the results of the change in the needs of the labor market and as such an adjustment to the environment.

To sum up we can see that the pure sciences, where output orientation was imposed unnaturally, are coming more and more back to their normal process-orientation. At the

vocational disciplines output orientation has gained a new value dew to the drift towards the market economy.

Central control comes back?

We have already seen that the liberalization of curricular matters has led to disfunctionalities. They were only partly solved by adjustment processes. It could be of course argued that these problems will disappear as time goes by. Still the reaction of the Ministry towards the curricular matters has changed with the last change of the government that followed the 1992 elections mostly dew to these problems.

The motives of the Ministry have realized the creation of a more general first two years with common courses that related study programs followed by a specialization in the subsequent study years and a certain standardization of degree programs in different institutions. The first motive was meant to prepare the curriculum for the introduction of a two-tier system while the second motive was the reaction to the great differences between the programs offering the same degree.

What happened practically was that the Ministry tried to impose a standardized curriculum for each degree-program, the level of standardization stopping at the titles of the compulsory courses building in fact a national core curriculum. The reaction of the academics was strong, lots of debates were taking place in the Ministry. Finally in some disciplines, mainly the technical ones, the institutions agreed upon a common curriculum, which was different to the one proposed by the Ministry, that was accepted. In other disciplines some changes had been proposed by the academics that have been accepted, but the curriculum of the Ministry remained mostly the same. As a first result we can currently find many courses having the same title but a widely different content.

In the first step that was taken by the Ministry academics found a symptom for the return of central control, on the other hand the negotiation was possible and the black-box of the classroom was not opened by the central decision.

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SCHOOL AND EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech society is experiencing certain changes in all spheres of life, in education as well as in other fields. In this process one's main feeling is that discontinuity with the previous socialist system, the strong will on behalf of a decisive part of society should stop this process, and also in identification with completely opposing values. This identification is being consciously searched from two sources. The first one is Western European continuity which society wants to take over. The second source of identity is based on an inter-war Czech democratic traditions. In times of a general detachedness from democracy in Central Europe, Czechoslovakia remained faithful to the democratic principles until the very end, its liquidation. However in neither of these two sources can a training program be found