

**IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION  
IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE  
AND THE ROLE  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION.  
EXPERIENCE OF BABES-BOLYAI  
UNIVERSITY, ROMANIA**

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*Currently there are more than twenty degree programs in public administration at public and private universities in Romania (Hințea, Ringsmuth, 1999). We have selected the public administration program at Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) to examine the impact of globalization, in particular through connection with European and American programs.*

After the 1989 revolution, Romania was overwhelmed by the complexity of the political, economic and social situation there, and the paucity of available resources to deal with the issues presented. Markets, using rules set elsewhere, replaced traditional patterns of doing things. The result was a general sense of helplessness and confusion. The situation was exacerbated by pressures from outside the country for reform of financial, fiscal and governance policies and practices to meet international requirements, while trying to satisfy demands from the complex and conservative society within Romania. Public administrators lacked experience with democracy and the concept of citizen as “consumer” of public goods.

The PA program at BBU responded by developing undergraduate and graduate curriculum that emphasized what the faculty term “a new type of mentality” – results oriented public administration, with an orientation towards skills development as opposed to the pure transmission of information. Some say that public affairs education and practice in the United States have changed periodically to meet the demands of the times (Kickert and Stillman,

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1999; Nelson, 2002). It is difficult to fully convey to the extent of change needed to reform the rigid, central-dominated system in Romania and the difficulty of doing so in a relatively short period of time. Change involved a new relationship with the community with the hope of making substantive change and also providing the department with a measure of relevance that would place it well in the search for new funding sources. In short, what was needed was a completely new way of teaching public administration in Romania, while simultaneously paying attention to local social, economic and cultural needs – all this together with a paucity of resources required the department to be more inventive than a department in a Western university.

Public Administration education was unknown in Romania before 1989. The Department at BBU, started in 1995 in the Faculty of Political and Administrative Sciences<sup>1</sup> with three full professors and 40 undergraduate students, had at the beginning of the 2004 academic year, 21 teaching staff and 900 students enrolled in three-and four- year undergraduate programs, four Masters programs in English in Public Services Management, Community Development, NGO Management and Local Public Finance Management (conducted in cooperation with four American universities)<sup>2</sup>, and a Masters program, taught in Romanian in collaboration with the Romanian National Institute for Public Administration that targets senior managers within the public sector in Transylvania.

### **Program evolution**

Under the previous system and under transitional society, new laws and regulations were adopted without any serious attention being paid to the capacity of the public structures to implement them. Decision-makers in CEE were accustomed to seeking solutions in published laws and regulations, a situation that is characteristic of continental European tradition. Globalization intervened as a wedge that stimulated change. The experience in Romania is nothing less than a change in the way people think. “For a century, liberal European welfare states could routinely function with lawyers and the state law in charge. These states now find comprehending and responding to the rapidity of numerous transformations can no longer be trusted to lawyers and the law” (Stillman 2, 1999, p.257).

Preparing students for the new environment influenced by globalization requires new subjects and approaches to learning. It was necessary to teach students the importance of profit and economic growth as the economic engine of a society, while also teaching them the importance of the public sector as the defender of the common good. This required special emphasis on new courses in ethics in public administration, environmental policies, social welfare policies, public-private partnerships, efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector and the development of a new type of public administration. Questions raised by faculty meeting during the summer of 2004 with colleagues from American universities were similar to those that are discussed in PA departments in the United States: theory versus practice, policy versus management, qualitative versus quantitative, specialization versus core knowledge skills (Denhardt, 2001, Barth, 2002).

Major reforms in the field of public administration in Romania are being driven by adhesion processes required by the European Union or NATO (Hintea, Sandor, Junjan, 2004). For example, the masters program taught in Romanian is related to the required EU accession criteria (the need for a better trained public official and a better management of public affairs). Those responsible for reforms in public administration are required to participate and successfully complete the program in an effort to accelerate the process of filling the gap between an antiquated system and a modern one. Western approaches such as “new public management” and “reinvention of government”, previously unknown, are now part of the public policy vocabulary in Romania.

PA Faculty at BBU have been either trained in the United States or influenced by American experience as a result of exchange visits with U.S. institutions. While explicitly “American oriented”,

<sup>1</sup> A “Faculty” is an academic organization within a university, which in this case is like a college of social sciences.

<sup>2</sup> Florida International, Michigan State, SUNY Albany, University of Delaware.

PA at BBU is also keenly aware that PA education programs are intertwined with the political and economic environment that constitute the “values of governance” in which they are located (Barth, 2002, p.260). BBU is located in Transylvania, a region of Romania with significant Hungarian, German and Roma minorities. Roots and obligations of the PA unit are in Transylvania, where its values will be determined and its relevance will be assessed. The PA program at the BBU from responded to these pressures in by developing undergraduate and graduate curriculum in a Western style of PA, while offering a number of courses, indeed degree programs, in languages spoken by minority groups in an effort to be responsive to local cultures -- an important factor to the stability of this area<sup>3</sup>.

Rising expectations of students and their families has been another important factor in the evolution of PA education. The Economist reports that 88% of Romanian secondary school children study French and 80% study English - among the highest proportion studying these languages anywhere in Europe (August 7, 2004). An increasing number of Romanians travel abroad either as workers or tourists. The result is an English speaking Masters program that represents an attempt by BBU to offer degrees that are internationally competitive.

The curriculum for higher education programs in public administration established by the Ministry of Education in 1995 was heavily dominated by law courses. The National Academic Accreditation Commission for higher education programs within public administration was at that time a subdivision of the commission that certified the same kind of programs in the field of law, thus all its members were law practitioners and academics. At the time the PA Department at BBU started to operate, there were very few faculty trained in Western traditions of public administration. No one knew how to develop a curriculum in public administration, so it was very difficult to successfully confront arguments by advocates for legal-based PA education in the National Academic Accreditation Commission.

In addition, important preconditions for effective public administration education were not present, which further complicated overcoming these obstacles. Financial resources were scarce and consisted almost entirely of transfers from the tradition-bound central Ministry of Education. Romanian literature in the field of public administration was non-existent. Books and studies on public administration in foreign languages were hard to obtain and difficult to understand. Links between newly emerging departments of public administration and civil society were weak, so there was little, if any, interaction of government, civil society and academia and no relationship between education of civil servants and public policy.

### **The strategy employed**

Globalization processes provided opportunities in the form of international cooperation that has been employed as a tool for institutional survival and development.

Fortunately, the Department benefited from an encouraging University leadership and academic environment that called for replacing traditionally centralized and paternalistic university management with a new model based upon restructuring of studies, re-launching of scientific research, a new interaction with the community, modernization of the physical structure, introduction of IT, decentralization of decision-making and budget authority, an orientation toward results-oriented management, encouragement of new and substantive forms of international cooperation (joint research units, joint degrees, and so on), and a multicultural approach to studies (Marga, 2004, p.40).

This internal reform proved to be vital to success in transforming the University and creating the public administration department. University Rector Marga understood the strategic need to be a significant actor international stage if the university were to have access to capital markets and an increasing claim on national resources for education. The Department was encouraged to set forth

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<sup>3</sup> The 2002-2003 University enrollment of 44,037 (up 88 percent in five years) included 9,511 native Hungarian speakers.

in the goal of developing a public administration program able to generate well-trained graduates who could cope with the challenges posed by a new and modern public administration in Romania. The emphasis has been relevance to the situation in Romania using American models and advice of American partners.

In order to assess the impact globalization had upon the development of the PA program in Cluj, the theoretical framework provided within the first part of the article is considered. Therefore, our analysis critically presents the significant changes that took place in this realm by tracing them along the three different dimensions that are extremely important with respect to globalization of the study of the study of public policy analysis and public administration, namely *Students and Pedagogy, Management and Budgets and Governance and Outreach*. It is our claim that each of these three vital areas have been significantly impacted by international relationships and practices that, at least up to a certain extent, are part of what it is commonly called globalization.

### **Students and pedagogy**

#### *Curriculum development.*

Thanks to a USIA grant managed by International Research and Exchanges Board, two members of the faculty traveled to ten American universities, and attended a NASPAA conference to learn more about curriculum development. Visits have also been made to European universities.

While it is standard practice in the United States, the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach to the curriculum is a key feature of the Department that sets it apart from other PA programs in the region. Though at the beginning this trend was regarded with hostility by “old” members of the academic community, who dominated the Accreditation Commission and wanted to retain the “legal-based” approach to the study of public administration, the interdisciplinary approach is gradually achieving acceptance within PA higher education programs in Romania. Programs at other universities are now using the curriculum developed at BBU as a starting point in the process of creating their own curriculum<sup>4</sup>.

An important lesson learned by the Department, and then disseminated throughout the country, was that the formerly centralized and monopolistic system of curriculum building at the national level must be discarded. Instead of the old top-down process of establishing a standardized curriculum, PA programs in Romania now increasingly engage in an ongoing process of combining the rigor of teaching accepted concepts with recognition of unique challenges within Romanian society. It is thus necessary to keep updating courses and any new ones. An example is the area of coursework in management and governance of NGOs. Non-profits have become influential actors within Romanian society. Cooperation of the Department with such entities is producing courses on nonprofit management that are just now being offered to students. International NGOs are influencing local nonprofit organizations, and in turn the University, to offer courses that will meet international (global) expectations.

#### *Developing teaching materials and publications*

Faculty have relied upon readings and texts by Western authors. While this represented an advantage for students to gain access to well written materials, and to enhance their knowledge of English language, it also meant that they were not exposed to case studies based on Romanian realities. To try to improve the situation, the Department publishes a series of books and monographs in public administration called “Administrative Science” and a journal, the “Transylvanian Review of Administrative Science”, the latter considered to be highly influential inside the Romanians public administration community. The format, content and process of publication in the journal are based upon international practice. The editorial board includes Romanian and American professors. Articles are refereed. Some of the published work is the result of explicit attempts by the Department to generate cooperation with

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<sup>4</sup> [www.polito.ubbcluj.ro](http://www.polito.ubbcluj.ro)

international partners. It is the opinion of the Department that the presence of American authors, editors and reviewers will add to international acceptance/recognition of the work of scholars in Romania and will increase the quality level of the research work in Romanian PA community.

Most of the writings that are to be found inside both the books carrying the label of the Administrative Science series and the Transylvanian Review incorporate the American approaches to the field of public administration. The Department requires that all students - - freshmen included - - read some works in the field in English. This has helped increase the proportion of the student population that masters the English language, a factor which provides students the opportunity to “blend in” to an environment influenced by globalization; speaking a foreign language is an important first step in this process.

#### *The students*

Student-faculty relationships are heavily based upon observations of younger faculty during visits in America. Several of the professors are younger than their graduate students. While this presents the occasional challenge, the youthful demographic has facilitated the development of a new attitude towards students, who are no longer seen as individuals upon whom professors may exercise authority, but as clients and colleagues. Students evaluate the quality of professors and courses. Students are encouraged to participate in recently established internship programs with the local and central government, and scholarships and training at foreign universities. These techniques seem to have worked well in student recruitment. In addition, after studying American experience, the Alumni Association in Public Administration at Babes-Bolyai University was created in 2003 to support to the Department through fund raising, curriculum analysis and internship programs.

#### **MA programs in public administration**

Probably the most visible global impact on the PA program at BBU is the MA programs taught in English. Few years ago, MA programs in public administration were virtually non-existent in Romania. The department created a program with three areas of concentration taught in English by American and Romanian professors. These programs have strengthened the reputation of the Department, because graduates can easily find work either in Romania or abroad. The Department takes pride in having one of its graduates hired to work abroad (either in Europe or US), as this means that a graduate of the program has been recognized as having the necessary skills to function effectively in a different society – an important result of the globalization process.

#### *The management of the department*

The cooperation with American universities has also generated important outcomes in the management of the department. Management includes the principle of decentralization and an orientation towards outcomes and institutional development. Studying the pragmatic approaches to management and leadership employed by public administration departments in the U.S. has helped the department increase its budget few times over the last three years. Currently the department has the largest budget in the Faculty of Political and Administrative Science and one of the largest budgets among all the departments at Babes-Bolyai University.

During its early years of existence, the Department relied exclusively upon foreign financial resources. Offices and labs for professors and students, books and other materials were paid for mostly with American-based grants. Currently, the Department covers most of these costs from its own budget. Thus, important resources can be targeted towards other dimensions of the development process

#### *Human resource management*

One of the most important challenges is a lack of human resources needed for the development of PA academic programs. It is difficult to teach public administration without having an academic staff that has been trained in this field, preferably with some practical experience. The policy of the Department has been focused on making sure that (1) new hires are selected from among the best

graduates of the Romanian programs in public administration nationwide; (2) each new hire undertake a training experience in the U.S., which has been found to favor the development of a collective mentality oriented toward outcomes; (3) individuals with public sector experience are recruited to the Department (approximately 35% of its members have held a position within public institutions before coming to work at the University); (4) there is an organizational culture based on a peer spirit, professionalism and pragmatism; and (5) the presence of at least one or two American professors at all times within the Department.

The presence of American faculty in the department has been extremely important. They have contributed to the development of the department by teaching and in by giving advice on the enhancement of the management process, serving as mentors for many of their younger Romanian counterparts. The average age inside the department is 35 years.

#### *Performance evaluation*

Due to the fact that the department itself could not complete a totally objective evaluation, every three years a bilateral meeting is held in Romania (the American partners play an important part in this process), a specific focus been placed on evaluation and strategic planning. Each time this approach based on the need for a realistic assessment of both the existing situation and the possible path for further development proved to be useful. This happens mainly because aside from mutual feelings of friendship and respect, the American counterparts who are familiar with the department's activity are also providing an objective critique of what is not working properly.

### **Governance and outreach**

#### *Building a research capability; involvement with the community*

Immediately after 1989, there was almost no research and consequently, very little influence upon public policy. Benchmarking a best practice learned from the American partners, the Department has created its own research unit (Center for Analysis, Management and Public Policies - CAMPP) that is now operating programs for both domestic (governmental bodies at the local and central level) and international partners. Recently, the Department, in collaboration with some American professors, analyzed existing practice and proposed a new program for citizen participation for the city government of Cluj Napoca. Also, the Department and Cluj city government have established an international consultancy group within the field of community development, in which both Romanian and American are participating.

#### *Training programs for public officials*

The relationship with the public administration has been and still is one of the most important issues an academic program in public administration has to deal with. In Romania this issue has had also a specific dimension due to the broader social and political context: most of the existing civil servants had no training in public administration, thus lacking the most fundamental theoretical knowledge. Some of them have been selected in the traditional spoils system. Thus, they may not understand exactly what their role is within the administrative system and some continue to have the same paternalistic, authoritarian attitude towards the citizens, who are seen more as subjects than clients. Thus, to the somehow traditional question "What are we supposed to teach these civil servants", other questions have been added, such as how to accommodate the peculiarities of Romanian public administration. Also, the young professors inside the department were confronted with the issue of obtaining respect from top senior managers, many of whom had worked within the field of Romanian public administration for more than 30 years.

When developing training programs for public officials at BBU, some of the following aspects have been taken into consideration. The international experience in this field has been closely scrutinized. For example, American colleagues have provided the academic staff in Cluj with useful advice about

how they are supposed to approach this specific target group. Handbooks, readers and case studies have been developed in Romanian, all focusing on the Romanian context and realities<sup>5</sup>. Western and Romanian guest lecturers are collaborating with the department. The main conclusion that came out of this experience is that what the civil servants finally respect is expertise. Due to the fact that public servants as a group are much more aggressive and pragmatic and much less willing to listen, it appears that the only way an academic will succeed in getting their attention is by clearly proving to them that there are still things concerning the public sector they don't know and need to learn.

It is interesting however to notice that, over the last 3 years, the number of civil servants seeking training inside the PA at BBU in Cluj has raised from a few dozen to 230 in 2004. Thus, PA at BBU has become the main provider of training for the people working inside the public sector in Transylvania. This happened despite the fact that due to the rigor of the program at BBU, civil servants who enrolled in the program at Babes-Bolyai University had to work much harder to get their degree than their colleagues who chose other universities in Romania. Based upon informal surveys of graduates, which will be formalized in exit interviews in future, this outcome is thought to be attributed to a view on the part of those who graduated from the program in Cluj that they received an excellent education there.

As one can notice, the influence globalization had on the three different aforementioned dimensions is perceived differently (Loessner, 2006):

- On the one hand, this type of internationalized experience provided the department with viable models with regard to its functioning (interdisciplinary approaches to various sub-fields of study, managerial models that emphasize decentralization and flexibility, a new type of relationship with students, a more applied component with regard to teaching, and new research directions);
- On the other hand, globalization generated a certain standardization with regard to activities; pressures came both from the adhesion process to NATO and EU and from the international organizations and structures the department is part of such as NISPACEE, NASPAA, EPAN, etc. Given this context, the development of a competitive profile within the international realm had to also consider and integrate the issue of maintaining the local specificity that defines BBU (such a feature is for example multiculturalism).

It can be argued that the PA at BBU has experienced since its creation and till present three subsequent developmental stages, all of them influenced by the globalization:

- *The learning/survival stage*. During this period the basic elements of the program have been established (objectives, curriculum, course development, various types of cooperation) as has a mechanism for coping with hostile attitudes on the behalf of those organizational networks that felt threatened by the development of the PA program BBU. It is safe to say that one of the most important reasons – if not the most important one – for the continuing presence of the PA Department at BBU is the support received from international cooperation that has given the program a degree of legitimacy and a support that it would have been impossible to be found at that time anywhere else.
- *The institutional development stage*. During this stage formal structures have been established, the administrative and academic staff have started to grow and develop, new programs have been created and the position of the Department inside the academic community in Romania has become much stronger. All these actions have been impacted and stimulated by cooperation with American partners.
- *The “internationalization” and qualitative consolidation stage*. This stage has only started and it represents a response to the opportunities and challenges brought by globalization. For example, due to the Bologna declaration, European universities are heading towards a much more unitary higher education process and towards an increase in the importance of Masters programs. Soon

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<sup>5</sup> Though this effort has been tremendous, the department has finally managed to publish handbooks for the civil servants enroll within the MA program.

enough, competition will become global, and Romanian universities will no longer compete solely with each other, but also with all European universities. At a time when other universities are just starting to build their MA programs the PA program at BBU has reached a level of rising maturity in this field by operating three English language MA programs. The strategic objective is very ambitious and deals with the establishment of some joint-degree and other cooperative programs between PA at BBU and similar Departments in the U.S. Also, PA at BBU is interested in creating in Cluj a PhD school in public administration. The key feature of this program would be that American professors officially become PhD supervisors. This will definitely address the issue of a lack of PhD supervisors in public administration that confronts the Romanian academic community. Such programs would represent a first in Eastern Europe and will give the PA at BBU the opportunity to gain a better position within the highly competitive environment that is envisioned to emerge in Europe. The role of American universities in accomplishing this strategic goal is again essential.

International cooperation can gain new meanings within the context of globalization; it can truly represent an important provider of new opportunities for all the parties involved. However, one should not believe that this field is characterized by unitary approaches. It can take place at different levels, it can involve different approaches and it certainly can generate different outcomes.

Jenei & LeLoup (1999) propose a fivefold classification; according to their model there are five different hierarchical stages of cooperation, namely: *Exchange of Contacts and Information*, *Systematic Exchange of Knowledge and Experience*, *Joint Action*, *Mutual Cooperation* and *Institutionalized Partnerships*. It is not easy to assess the experience PA at BBU had within the field of international cooperation according to this model; however, the basic idea of a gradual evolution of relationships over the time can be definitely depicted.

The first stage of cooperation (1996-1998) can be considered to be part of what Jenei & LeLoup call *Exchange of Contacts and Information*. The main activities include the establishment of primary and informal relationships among the involved parties and the exchange of basic information. Subsequent to this phase (1998-1999) these first contacts have been consolidated into a more continuous, solid cooperation.

The *Joint Action* level consists in establishing common programs among partners that outlined specific objectives and were funded from international sources- a good example refers to a State Department grant aimed at training our professors abroad, at Western universities, and developing a training center for public servants. We are mindful that a successful East-West cooperation is defined as the creation of structures, mechanisms, abilities and intellectual capacities *able to be self-sustainable long after a particular international grant ends*.

It can be argued that as major structural programs have been developed- such as the four MA programs that are run in cooperation with American universities. With this achievement, another phase has been reached, namely the *Mutual Cooperation* stage that could develop in the future as *Institutionalized Partnership*. The strategy designed in order to reach this phase includes the development of joint/dual degree programs or of a PhD in which the American partners will play a major role.

The impact of globalization can be different depending upon the quality of local management. It is almost impossible to assess the attitude of the CEE structures towards these kinds of global experiences: some have only seen the threats associated with this phenomenon; others decided to concentrate on the opportunities. The outcomes are also mix: some managed to be successful, some didn't. There are also some that proved to be incapable of understanding or accepting this trend. The variety of outcomes can be attributed to characteristics of local institutions and the adaptability and relative entrepreneurial character of their managements.

The transfer of certain Western models without any effort to adapt them can lead to negative results (Loessner, 2006). From this perspective international cooperation is not just a potential factor

of globalization but also a tool meant to help the development of local managerial structures capable to further take advantage of the new challenges and opportunities represented by globalization. On the other hand one must examine how differently or similarly international partners perceive the influence of globalization. On the one hand, it is a fact that PA programs can no longer ignore the global trend and its effects - an example is the international accreditation process, in which American and Western European professional networks are more and more interested.. On the other hand many universities fail to acknowledge an obvious fact: international cooperation no longer means just casual contacts and nice visits at the partner universities. It is more based upon team work among universities located in different parts of the world that results in the creation of complimentary approaches to teaching and research. Outcomes from such partnerships are not intended to develop a single approach that enforces one culture to mirror another, but rather to celebrate different characteristics, while at the same time working together to be more competitive on a global scale than either of the institutions would be without such cooperation. An important question in higher education is how best to get university faculty and administrators to understand, accept and promote this trend.

It is our opinion that those Eastern European Public Administration departments that have undergone such a transition and restructuring process can provide the rest of the academic community with potentially valuable best practices. The context these departments had to function in may be described by the need to rapidly move from one stage to another within their organizational development, constantly adapting to rapid changes, while confronted with limited resources. Therefore they had to be creative, adaptive and use the international partnerships as tools for strategic development. All these aforementioned concepts and practices tend to become more and more important for universities as they are affected by globalization.

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