

COMBINING THREE PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES EDUCATORS', EMPLOYERS' AND GRADUATES' WHEN DESIGNING QUALITY ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT: The fact that the overall image and the rating of the Universities imply the assessment of the employability of their “output” imposed specific investigational means to the system. More and more elaborate and applied at relevant scale formulas of tracking the after-graduation path appeared. Starting with the late 1990s our University decided to make operational a scheme that would constantly monitor the professional life of our graduates, but one should acknowledge that during the early 2000s the findings (output) have been scarcely encapsulated in effective curricular changes (input). Our research goes mainly towards investigating how the “old fashioned” curricular design has changed during the decade of the 2000s, as adapting to market entropy and also on how the increased pressure to balance “traditional” academic knowledge as well as the newly patterned skills and competencies re-shape the process of designing academic programs today. We ground our discourse on several layers of empirical data, collected during 1997 – 2007, data gathered from three main sources – students’ surveys, employees’ surveys, and internal documents regarding curricular development. Firstly it is the University’s own labour market insertion studies, secondly, several polls of the employers’ opinion concerning our graduates and thirdly our own research on how various higher education approaches contributed to our graduates’ “professional take-off”, research targeting recent years’ graduating cohorts. Meanwhile we try to observe how this kind of three layered type of data would connect to the dynamics of the curricular change, as observed in several departments of our University.

1. AIMS, SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical and Pragmatic Arguments

The last decade and especially the last couple of years came with a lot of challenges for the academic world, especially in the “de-structured” Central and Eastern Europe space. Lots of interrogations concerning the state of the system surfaced, but one appears to be much more vivid than others: to what extent are organizational structures, governance, and decision-making in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) facilitating, or in a fortunate scenario, shaping the links between Universities and Labour Market, as overall recipient of the University “output”. EC’s DG Education and Culture worked lately quite extensively on this matter. [1] As a preliminary remark, it seems we must focus more on how have curricula been influenced by the feed-back received from various extra-academic stakeholders, on increased resources, methodologies and/or incentives attached to the idea that the present landscape of HE depends less and less on traditionally endogenous factors and more and more on exogenous, hardly if not at all controllable with “classical academic tools”. [2]

Such a perspective could induce the idea that a set of good practices could and should be raised to the status of normative benchmark, as for instance the most reputed MBAs in Japan entirely moved from the Universities’ premises towards the business environment. Or, considering the contemporary pattern of “technological diffusion” and the change of paradigm concerning the management of firms and institutions, it could be said that embedding ab initio such knowledge as ICT or at least two foreign languages, would be a winning ticket no matter what. To a certain extent we can say that such a process of “pragmatic-sation” or “empiric-sation” of our academic life, comes along with a return to the basics of knowledge, to those layers of education enabling graduates to

improvise, to be professionally more flexible, grounded on a set of knowledge that barely reminds the main track followed by that particular student. It is precisely this apparent paradox that makes so difficult the process of designing/redesigning curricula to the benefit of all the “publics” involved.

Nevertheless we try to solve this task through a procedure we would like to describe as “mental triangulation process”. It is well known that geometry triangulation is the process of determining the location of a point by measuring angles to it from known points at either end of a fixed baseline, rather than measuring distances to the point directly. The point can then be fixed as the third point of a triangle with one known side and two known angles. Social sciences adopted and adapted triangulation as a procedure of positioning a certain idea, candidate, or any other entity in some place between the extremes of the spectrum of a certain domain. So, our discourse would be, in a sui generis expression, an approach towards shaping the landscape of HE, through multilayered HEI’s professional approach (curricular, structural, decisional) as well as by weighting and embedding empirical experience offered by both employers and graduates into the accepted features of a more functional and responsive labour market. Simpler put, make a more stable build-up, by properly weighting the input of the three pillars of the system: HEIs, employers and last but not least, graduates.

Switching to the Bologna system in 2005 was a process that came with a lot of precautions, criticism but also expectations from all the players. In the case of Romania, both Law 2008/2004 concerning HE and Governmental Decision 88/2005 concerning undergraduate studies were designed in order to overcome the liability of shortening the length of studies with a quarter while assigning HEIs the task to train more autonomous learners, capable of flexibility and adaptability over the labour market. Adopting Bologna was a conceived also a step towards a change in the “soaking with

information the students/drying them when necessary” pattern in order to move faster towards developing general competences in various fields of study, not simple areas, transferrable skills and learning skills. It was conceived in order to be consistent with Europe 2020, EU’s growth strategy for the coming decade. [3] It is obvious now, after several years of investigations, that the accountability of HEIs in achieving these goals would be quite limited and heavily amended by the outside of HEIs perspective on the efficiency of the overall HE system, in terms of employability.

A Higher Education Institution’s Perspective

The above-mentioned preliminary arguments induce the necessity for an innovative view over the operational mechanisms a dynamic University is “forced” to undertake, such as: explicit or implicit acceptance of the labour market statements concerning the structure and quality of the graduate output; own assessments of the employability of the output, through specific econometrics (such as the employability within the training domain, contributing to the rating of the Universities); relevant scale means of tracking the after-graduation path over the market (conducted both at undergraduate and graduate levels); developing strategic frameworks, consistent with other strategic public documents (applicable to public HEIs); own evaluation and forecasting of the labour trends. [4] It is only through a comprehensive, inevitably of interdisciplinary consistence approach that “holds together” various stakeholders’ interest and positions that a University can cope with the increasingly stronger institutional pressures of today. This could be the only path to aggregate what the Lisbon Agenda suggest to be in the predictable future the reality of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Innovation in the academic world is and should be driven by the so called “culture of quality”. Values, beliefs, expectations and commitments toward quality should be treated and integrated individually and institutionally through culture. [5] Though ancient the culture of quality gets new contents since HE became of mass scale and the switch from elitist type of education to a system of properly and democratically disseminating information and knowledge, while the academic landscape becomes more and more a competitive specific market, illustrated by entrepreneurship to the detriment of traditional values, as professional excellence. Or coping no matter what with the needs of the clients can lead to mixed results in terms of academic quality, which is a concept that would be validated only in the long run. Not only the quality of the adopted curricula falls under this judgment but also the various public or private services HEIs are undertaking for both earning money and gaining visibility and implicitly market share and all these facts should be combined for a relevant perspective.

There is no doubt that the perspective of most Romanian Universities changed under the pressure of a fast-changing market, of domestic and foreign competitors and last but not least, of international benchmarks. Quality as a concept gradually became more and more linked to market performance, econometrically assessed and managerially supervised. But one should acknowledge the fact that grounded also on a specific phase of alienation that was illustrative for Romania during the 80s (Polytechnic–sation of education), our HE lost much of the humanistic core that is specific in Europe for millennia and which encapsulates a system that targets educating not only specialists but also responsible citizens and taxpayers. What should balance the two sides of the equation

when designing a specific curriculum, having these facts in mind? Even more, and trying to get beyond the inherent rhetorical factors, do we acknowledge the fact that we face now a new paradigm, that of “the student that learns, mostly by him/herself” instead of the centuries old paradigm of the “student that is taught”?

Employers’ Market Driven Approach

Any consistent observation of the way market reacts to the investigated issues would indicate a rather split, dual track approach: the “conservative” one – businesses want job based competencies to be developed by HEIs and are expecting graduates with detailed custom designed skills. On the other hand the newly patterned ICT type of post-industrial framework gradually developed a much more “innovative” one: they want flexible graduates, able to “grasp” a peculiar organizational culture, of their own. To what degree both these standings represent constructive or destructive positions between the academic world and the business world this is debatable. It could be also said that the outlook might be interpreted as an indicator of failure to “educate the market” towards the approaches and values of an efficient, strategically bound HE system. [6] Or a failure of the HEIs which could not cope with the pace of the “outside world” and evolved following own endogenous training and updating schemes and thus making the gap larger and larger. It should be also pointed that much depends in this respect on the legal framework in that specific country and also on the dominant organizational culture of the place and time analyzed.

A typical, efficient labour market would have several layers of operational mechanisms in order to match HEIs supply with businesses demand. Firstly would be considered the human capital and labour and human resources market insertion studies. It is a task that usually would be shared by the Ministry of Labour and the system of the Chambers of Commerce. The next step would be the polls of the employers’ opinions that are conducted for different purposes as well as those public pools that are supposed to unveil the general perception on certain topics. [7] One could notice that we witness nowadays the spreading of national, international and supranational (read EU) certified expertise and aggregate conclusion on the state and evolution of the labour market and its influences. Migration studies, “brain drain” or studying abroad and eventually staying for good in the country of study are rather indicative and illustrative phenomena in this respect, not to mention the various facets of the internationalization and globalization of the labour market.

Nowadays, employability does not mean by far only qualifications, incentives, social policies, labour market flexibility, or freedom to move across the borders. It also means fitting within larger schemes, such as the European Qualifications Framework, [8] which imply knowledge, skills and competences valid and consequently recognition throughout EU. But in order to do that we have to comply with the so called Dublin Indicators [9] leading to transparency concerning the quality of the process of education and ranking. Qualifications frameworks and consequent developments within this area are considered to be the very cornerstone of the Bologna procedural changes that will unleash a new vision concerning employability. A single job and a single salary all along the working life are definitely past history even in the most conservative views and HEIs should take some responsibility also in the direction of creating the social mental state that would be favourable towards this outcome. This

assessment was validated long time ago in places like North America, Europe has to face this reality now, before losing more competitive advantage.

The Graduates' Standing

A typical pool among fresh graduates would roughly indicate that they want to “match” with the labour market more or less from the first day after graduation, or at least this would be a post-BA assessment. This implies that graduates retrospectively want more exposure to “real life” during their academic years, less theory and more case studies and good practices. That logically imply more differentiation in HEIs' curricula, more flexible educational schemes and substantially consistent with the trends of globalization, more internationalization of their studies. [10] Meanwhile one should acknowledge that the accountability from “this side of the triangle” could be quite limited: it would take a reasonable large cohort of graduates to reach a decent level of significance. Operational mechanisms that could trigger a more accurate feedback could be developed through an appropriate culture of alumni-type of organizations or through the identification of the formal/informal leaders of various sectors, involving them in the case and training them as HE lobbyists. Actually this approach should be encapsulated in our opinion deducted from Romanian realities, in a larger framework which implies the fact that HEIs should reconsider their overall involvement and communication with the civil society as a whole.

The empowerment of the graduates for the well being of themselves and future generations is a difficult task indeed. The rationale for this statement lies in the very core of the competitive system that modern societies are enforcing. One the one hand HEIs are “preaching” individualism and competition as panacea for efficiency and quality, on the other hand ability to socialize, communicate and network are requirements for an educated present day citizen. Solving this paradox probably implies adjusting the teaching/learning process to each individual, enhancing the consulting/tutoring layer of education and preparing a more “custom design” type of curricula. [11] Would such an approach be valid HEIs wide or only among the most well (financially and in terms of human resources) endowed ones? The purpose of generating as “output” a “reflective student and graduate” should generate probably more curricular effort than the simpler approach of making more in terms o effective teaching/learning. A truly reflective graduate, as a purposely targeted result of the process of education would overcome most if not all the liabilities and distortions implied by the process of harmonization between the academic world and the business one.

Instead of Conclusions: Combining Perspectives

HEIs are societal a framework just as the businesses are. Their environment is definitely shaped by more or less the same macro-factors. [12] But conventional wisdom says they are something beyond. If innovation and accelerated change are obvious present day realities, it is debatable which institutional framework would be the leading force of change towards Knowledge Society. Many observers consider this as a matter of organizational culture that develops along the traditions and peculiarities of each country. It is a fact that in present day Romania most public policies failed to impose HEIs as benchmarks for. [13] But to a reasonably large extent, HEIs also failed on their own hand and there are plenty of arguments in this respect. Connecting HEIs to the business environment,

in a contractual manner, as it happens in the United Kingdom, could be an answer, just as connecting public HEIs to various layers of public administrators, in a pragmatic manner, just as the Land Grant Universities do in the United States, could be another. One matter appears as a blueprint in this respect: combining perspectives should not occur under any circumstances as a consequence of subjective political will.

The reconsideration of the HE system according to the new demographic trends in most developed countries and the imperatives of demo-Economics of today, such as Life Long Learning, appear to impose a “new pragmatism” concerning the management and governance of the academic system. But traditionally HEIs are quite seldom pro-active when it comes to shaping their peculiar environment. It is the labour market that adjusts and equilibrates the various relationships, but it does it definitely on a customer-buyer pattern. “Triangulation” occurring from both educational “output” and labour sides balances the complex equation of curricular academic development, generating significant input and limiting the side effects due to the lack of proper institutional means in place, effects that are somehow inevitably induced during a time of major transformations. It would also compensate the fact that for obvious reasons HEIs perspective would be biased in many cases, the specificity of the organizational culture of the academic world objectively acting as an over-pushing factor. Let's face it: HE always needed and still needs in order to operate properly a “greater social scope” and accordingly a more sophisticated philosophy than the market-driven one.

2. BABEŞ-BOLYAI'S INSERTION EVOLUTION BETWEEN 1997 – 2007

Labour Market Insertion

The study on insertion over the labour market of UBB's graduates, following the principles mentioned in the previous pages of this paper, was commissioned in 1997, but consistent data collection started in February 1999. In order to interview the graduates we used a questionnaire with 39 items. The questionnaire was (and still is) structured on 4 sections: the first section offers information about the respondent (age, gender, permanent address, civil status, parents' background and occupation, etc.); the second section refers to the graduates' traineeship offered by UBB (insufficiently studied subjects, subjects that were not studied at all but would have been useful, postgraduate courses (like master studies, doctoral studies, another department than the graduating one's offer or other courses); the third section refers to their former and current working places (whether they had a job during their studies, how many jobs have they already had, their status on the labour market at the moment, how they found their jobs, when they got the first job, whether they intend to change their working place in the next period and if so why, about the type of organization they are working for – private or public, whether their job matches their field of study); the fourth section offers information about the reasons of graduates unemployment (why they haven't had a job yet, why they do not have a job at the moment, what they think it would benefit them for future predictable employment, etc.).

The graduates were asked to fill in this questionnaire when they come to pick up their diploma or any other certificate of study issued by our University. There is no custom made sampling procedure, all the graduates showing to the desk in order pick up their diplomas are simply asked to fill in the questionnaire. There is a very low, if none, rate of rejection of

the action. Based on the ground data we collected using the above mentioned methodology this paper we will draw on the in details provided in the second section, that refers to the graduates' professional education and traineeship offered by UBB through the undergraduate programs in place at those respective moments through more than a decade. Obviously, for objective reasons, the number of graduates questioned does not represent the total number of UBB's graduates during the time of investigation.

Table 1 shows the number of graduates compared with the number of those who picked up their diploma. It can be observed that not all the graduates are hurrying to pick up their proof of study, as there still are people who graduated 5-7 years ago who did not pick up their diploma. The reasons for the delay are multiple and diverse: the graduates have been employed based on a certificate of graduation which is issued at the completion of their studies, certificate that would be valid for 12 months and later the employer does not ask for the diploma anymore (this signifies he/she did not change the working place); the graduates, for different reasons are not employed with a valid legal employment contract; the graduates started their own businesses; after graduation, they left the country working abroad (some employers do not ask for the certificates of studies, especially if they fill working positions in other fields of activity than the graduation one); the graduates are employed on a position not requiring higher education studies; the graduates are holders of multiple degrees, currently using a different one over the labour market; the graduates have another EU acknowledged degree; any other situation.

Table 1. UBB Graduate Cohorts

Year of graduation	Graduates who passed their undergraduate examination*	Graduates who filled in the questionnaire	
		Number	%
1997	3.116	3.107	99,71%
1998	3.174	2.454	77,31%
1999	3.475	2.636	75,85%
2000	3.519	2.528	71,83%
2001	3.949	3.043	77,05%
2002	4.864	4.009	82,42%
2003	4.806	4.203	87,45%
2004	5.488	4.397	80,12%
2005	5.312	4.249	80%
2006	6.061	5.030	83%
2007	7.320	5.929	81%
2008	15.162	8.642	57%
2009	7.721	2.779	36%

*Data collected from UBB's Rector's Office

Quality of Education Assessment

Regarding the overall quality of education and acquired competencies, there is a batch of questions aimed at capturing the opinion of the graduates, questions about the quality of the various layers of training they get during their undergraduate studies. Once they get a job, they can assess and judge for themselves whether they have the abilities needed, whether they have the knowledge demanded, and all the present day labour market requirements in order to be competitive, or whether they have the basic skills in order to acquire the new peculiar skills, as required by their current employers. The graduates' answers to these kind of mostly qualitative issues

are synthetically (a six track of disciplines, ranging from the core disciplines of various areas to pedagogy or practice, was aggregated) presented in Figure 1.

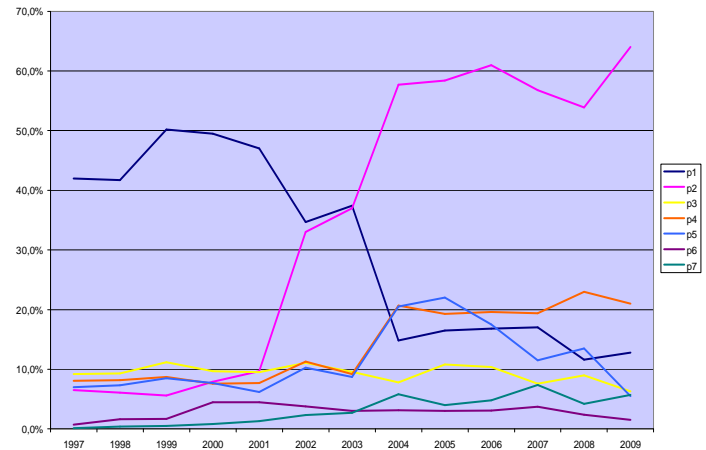


Figure 1. Disciplines considered to be insufficiently studied
 Legend: P1 – disciplines in specialty, P2 – practice, P3 – disciplines of the pedagogic module, P4 – foreign languages, P5 – computer science, P6 –social sciences and humanities

It can be observed that the class of 1997 lays a greater emphasis on the so called disciplines of specialty (field of study); however, the situation is reversed, starting more or less with the class of 2004, which definitely emphasizes more the practical aspects, or the study of good practices. The situation can be roughly explained by the expansion of the private sector within the structure of the national economy, sector which is definitely interested more in what the employees can do using a theoretical basis and less in what theoretical knowledge they have without the ability to put it into a practical framework. (See Figure 2)

Tracking Employers' View

Thus, from the first level of competencies “to know and understand” the stress commutes on the second level of “to know and act”. It is observed the increase of the percentage of those declaring the insufficient knowledge in the computer use and foreign languages. These two last categories are part of the so called “transferable skills”. The employers in the private sector (the increase of the sector was approximated to up to 50% during the timetable of investigation) are keen about an immediate, “on the spot” application of the knowledge of the employees. These observations are roughly speaking confirmed by the employers, via various sources. In 2002, UBB's Centre for Strategic Development and Management worked out the study “Opinion of the employers regarding the quality of overall training of the UBB graduates”. [14] A significant number of employers were questioned about what they consider to be lacking in the quality of overall training of the UBB graduates. They stated in a relevant and illustrative proportion of 84,3% that the practical abilities and practical training could be sensibly improved, thus implying that they should play a certain increased role at least in the process of curricular development, if not in the overall educational approach of the HEI.

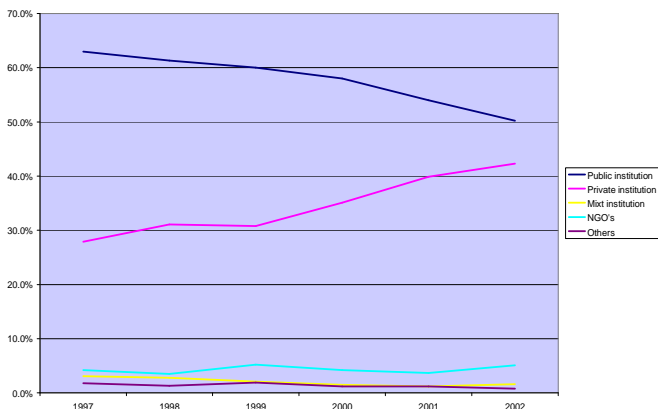


Figure 2. Employers' typology at the moment of the poll

Considering those educational tracks to be defined as “transferable skills” (foreign languages and computer literacy) it is precisely the same spot 2004 that marks the inflexion of the graph (as observed in Figure 3) and thus confirming the opinion that those areas are of higher importance for the graduates of 2000s than for those of the 1990s. One can notice from the above mentioned source of information that “communication in foreign languages” has an increasing trend, the computer literacy tends to decrease. The factors that generate this outcome could be described as belonging to the Romanian educational framework as a whole. While foreign languages are quite popular in institutional ways, from kindergarten to higher education, computer literacy could be branded as a mostly empirically acquired skill, that gets relevant only when a teenager, but shows that computer skills also are “pre-shaped” once enrolled in higher education. Now, coming back to the study concerning the opinion of the graduates, the questionnaire includes also the question “what other disciplines not studied enough during your period of study/degree course you feel could be useful in your professional career?” The answers of the subjects are presented in Figure 3.

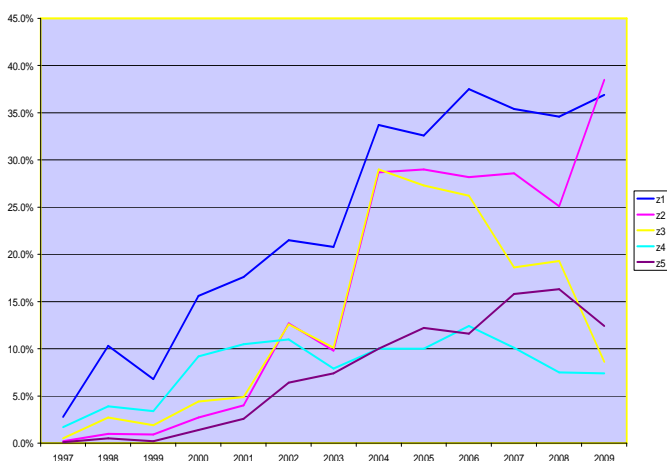


Figure 3. Disciplines considered to be critical and are not studied enough

Notation: Z1 – disciplines in specialty, Z2 – foreign languages, Z3 – ITC discipline, Z4 – socio-humanities, Z5 - others

This situation could be explained by the fact the curricula of their major field of study is not sufficiently updated to the realities in the field and other disciplines of the main track of study fully load the teaching timetable. A far greater demand is expressed for computer science and foreign languages. In the category of socio-humanities, among the disciplines basically

not studied or insufficiently approached, graduates mention communication, team work, and management. These also belong to the category generically branded as transferable skills.

Switching to the opinion of the employers regarding the professional requirements that their employees are expected to fulfil – this approach was captured through some question listed below Table 2. Ninety-six percent of the employers assess the theoretical background of the graduates as good and very good, while their practical skills rank quite the opposite (34.2%). Meanwhile the so called transferrable skills are rated by the employers as satisfactory, anyway between the theoretical and practical knowledge.

Table 2. Employers' Opinion concerning UBB Graduates' Skills

	Very Good	Good	Average	Low	Very Low
Theoretical knowledge	50,8%	46,3%	2,9%	-	-
Practical knowledge	7,7%	26,5%	18,5%	38,7%	8,6%
Foreign languages	20,8%	46,5%	30,4%	0,3%	1,9%
Computer abilities	11,5%	38,0%	47,3%	1,3%	1,9%
Social sciences and humanities*	10,2%	25,9%	59,1%	3,5%	1,3%

* Such as: Psychology, Sociology, Communication, Interpersonal Skills, etc.

Focusing the HEI's educational approach on the development of professional skills needed in order to resonate with the labour market leads to curricular change in accordance with the international evolution and to the suggestions contributed by the graduates, suggestions related to the disciplines that they consider important for the period after they are being hired. All these were designed in order to facilitate the insertion on the labour market and further professional development of the graduates. So we can conclude that three curricular major changes were of special importance during this period, extremely relevant from the perspective of increasing the employability of UBB graduates:

a) Foreign languages skills – increasing the share/percentage of foreign languages as separate disciplines, conditioning the acceptance to the final degree examination, application for MAs and doctoral studies, to a standard level of language skills. Increase the number of disciplines available in order to learn foreign languages at both graduate and undergraduate levels, meanwhile increasing the number of specializations taught in mother tongue, in the framework of the Hungarian and German study lines.

b) ITC disciplines – increasing the share of disciplines related to computer use, regarding the development of general skills and specific computer user skills in professional/scientific/didactic fields as well.

c) Introducing disciplines that favour the development of peculiar instrumental skills, in straight connection with the evolution of the labour market and innovative human resources patterns.

3. CURRICULAR CHANGE AS AN IMPORTANT MECHANISMS IN SUSTAINING QUALITY IN EDUCATION

Institutional construction

Institutional changes were made operational at two primary levels: institutional construction and curriculum development. The major turn on the curricular policy at UBB came along with the perspective open by the endorsing of the Bologna Declaration and by the opening towards European Higher Education Area. The interval extending from 1997 to 2000 was characterized by major reforms indeed. At national level important regulations for the HEIs sector were generated during the years 1993 and 1995, mainly regarding accreditation of HE institutions and the status of the academic staff. Following these regulations, UBB issued its first Academic Chart in 1995 and its first strategic plan in 1996. An important part of these measures concerned the internationalization of education, both in terms of curricular development as well as in terms of quality assurance. As a consequence, during the following years, UBB was evaluated by relevant international actors such as Salzburg Seminar and European University Association. [15]

Constant commitments towards the international developments and towards the use of the best practices, as found throughout EU, were important factors that sustained the development towards a competency based approach of the educational framework at UBB. The fact that our University started the re-adaptation of the curricula based on international experiences, assured an early start of this process. Both influences were taken into consideration when re-thinking the curricular development – international evolution in the field and the change of the labour market in Romania, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s when important shifts characterized the field. Important structures and operational plans emerged, such as the Curricular Council, the International Relations Vice – Rector's Office with a specific mission on developing partnerships and selecting good practices that could be implemented at UBB. The Centre for University Development (CDU) was also created, having as major target to offer analyses that could increase the quality and effectiveness of the decisions especially in the field of graduates employability and employees opinion on UBB graduates. As a result CDU launched after 1999 a series of major yearly studies covering topics such as: Graduates' Insertion, Employees' Opinion Survey, Students' Recruitment Area, Classes Evaluation by Students, etc. [16]

Also as a mean to foster its reformed language policies two centres were established, centres that issued a new vision on the linguistic policy at UBB – Lingua (1999) and Alpha Centre (2002). The linguistic policy was developed in order to reflect the developments at EU level and offers now the possibility for students to study 2 foreign languages at bachelor level. [17] Actually the linguistic policy in UBB was designed on a two tier system: most common internationally spoken languages across EU (English, French, German, Spanish and Italian) on the one hand, niche languages (Scandinavian, Russian, Chinese, etc.) on the other.

Curricular development

The perspective induced by the Bologna Process meant in the first phases the effort to focus the curricular development on two main aspects: developing the structure of the present day and predictable future curriculum for specific fields, in order to

be able to offer relevant education and professional practice for different levels – bachelor, master degree and doctoral degrees in a shorter time than before; create mechanisms to reflect properly the evolution of students' needs as well as employers' needs in the curricula.

In order to form those skills that are considered by students and employers quite difficult to acquire (communication, teamwork, managerial abilities of various consistence, etc.), most departments of UBB either introduced separate disciplines or oriented their students toward those departments providing that sort of knowledge.

In 2003 the focus of UBB was to develop and extend the educational framework in order to cover this new direction in its evolution. The main change was to rethinking the entire curricula based on competencies and a model of profile of the future graduate and also on shaping competencies according to the new, more demanding structure 3+2+3 years of study. Previous engagements of our University towards "in-depth analysis" process with its major stakeholders coming from the private sector (UBB elected managers of relevant companies from North Western Development Region of Romania as members of the consultative body of its Extended Senate) led to an orientation of the curricula towards market and employers' demand by focusing on developing technical and managerial skills as well as proficiency in foreign languages. New faculties and departments were opened as a response to both economic development of the region/country and to the need to enhance its social and cultural profile – Faculty of European Studies, Faculty of Business, Faculties of Theologies (4).

Considering foreign languages, a decision was made in order to reform the language study at UBB and to establish general performance criteria regarding proficiency in foreign languages as important steps in obtaining the bachelor, master and doctoral diploma. Foreign languages become part of the curricula but also performance criteria. The lines of study also were diversified and extended from major lines in Romanian and Hungarian to lines of studies in German, English, Italian, etc. Due to these strategic curricular decisions at the level of 2007 the statistics shows important figures – at the level of 2007, 36104 undergraduate students studied in Romanian language, 6735 in Hungarian, 990 in German and 633 in English. At master level 3099 were studying in Romanian, 308 in Hungarian, 66 in German, 758 in English, 80 in French, 11 in Italian and 8 in Russian. The number of specialization increase from 19 in 1989 to 83 in 1997 to 102 in 2007 [18].

UBB over the years adapted its strategic approach to reflect its own values. From the curricula development point of view two main directions were followed: a. the preservation of origins and traditions by remaining a representative educational, social and cultural institution of Transylvania - a multicultural and multi confessional university; b. capitalise on its new profile developed after 1990, of being a leader in the reform and innovation of HE in Romania especially through innovation regarding students education and qualification.

The academic year 2006 – 2007 was characterized by significant developments in the field of curricular adaptation and development – courses were made accessible for all students in different faculties, no matter where they were officially enrolled, as a mean to promote flexible career paths and flexible educational routes, in two forms of attendance – full time attendance, implying final examination, or the so called audient form of attendance, without any requirements

related to evaluation or final exams. The courses that were highly appreciated in this respect were mainly courses in the fields of educational sciences, psychology, IT, statistics, research methodology and various aspects of management. [19]

At bachelor level the perspective opened after 2007 is to develop alternative to the existing routes curricula, to extend and develop potential links between HE curricula and occupational schemes at national and European level, increase the number of interdisciplinary fields of study, find opportunities to develop double degrees routes, extend and develop the experimental and interdisciplinary approaches in the study of different topics. An important step towards achieving this stage was the creation of interdisciplinary groups of discussion on the curricula, as well as interdisciplinary research centres and departments that can submit to appropriate bodies important shifts in the curricula.

The existence of a special structure that offers postgraduates courses for the community offers an important perspective on making more “plugged in” classes as well as on the expectations of the business environment and society concerning students’ competencies when graduating a specific educational cycle. Cooperation projects are also developed in the field of academic reading and writing that aim to train students to act as professional and also PR appealing “knowledge transfer engines” from HEIs to the society as a whole.

At master level the focus will be on increasing the number of international master degrees that could offer a wide access to subjects taught in foreign languages, on developing new MA programs that are relevant in terms of qualifications, both for the national and European labour market dynamics but meanwhile strongly linked to the regional developments as expected in the near future. An example of the kind would be those master degrees that focus on training project managers, financial managers, human resources managers that also have competencies on the field of policy analysis and evaluation, strategic management, organizational diagnosis.

The curricula at doctoral level is mainly oriented towards the international outlook of a specific field and it is grounded on developing research competencies related to the doctoral field but also research management competencies and project management competencies in order to make the doctoral student able to be adaptive and flexible on the research market which is obviously one of the most competitive markets today.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Triangulation as a mean to elaborate and foster the institutional curriculum development might seem to be an effective tool in providing a new perspective on students’ competencies that allows them a good start over the labour market. Even though, it makes sense to notice that it gives roughly speaking mostly a retroactive, as opposed to a proactive perspective concerning the educational community and its goals. Generated by various events on the labour market and by the progress of research and science in terms of high level competencies development, this approach is scientifically correct but does not answer pragmatically, namely in real time to societal needs. A proactive position from the part of universities will be possible only by developing common forecasting mechanisms that involves the triangulation of “voices” of the academic community, students (graduates) and labour market. This comprehensive strategy can give an extensive view on major

dynamics that could impact on the need for general and specific competencies, but even so the adaptation of the entire system to a new, possible, accurately predicted reality remains a highly debated issue.

Overcoming the traditional way of thinking and acting “in the ivory tower” seems accomplished nowadays, but switching towards a single beacon that shapes the system only from the market’s perspective might turn to be just as wrong on the long run as the traditional approach. Enabling views, angles or perspectives from all the three corners of the triangle, without any major obstruction or distortion could be the tactical answer to the problems concerning curricular development resonant with the labour market, facing HEIs today. Ultimately the future of the entrepreneurial university heavily depends on the ability to make flexible decisions over this matter. Beyond sticking to the current trends that might prove irrelevant on the long run, HEIs must balance between tactical and strategic ways of innovating a millennia old system.

As an illustrative entity of the Romanian HE system Babeş-Bolyai University considers that during these years and also during the years to come, it should undertake a position as a leading institution among the most innovative ones. Though it is quite evident now that our University has made important steps towards a student centred approach in education, as well as in the direction of its opening towards the community by developing different cooperation schemes with a large range of actors and stakeholders from the private and public sectors, there are still important developmental steps to be made in order to build in depth the framework of UBB’s educational supply that could foster both the “quality” of its students and graduates and its position and overall image in the Romanian and European landscape of HEIs.

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