THE ROAD TO WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITY STATUS.
THE CASE OF UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST

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5th International Conference on World-Class Universities
3-6 November, 2013
Shanghai, China

OUTLINE

✓ International rankings and the global competition’s pressure on HEIs
✓ International HE system
✓ The Romanian HE system and the issue of excellence
✓ In search for excellence. The case of University of Bucharest
International HE system

In the past 10 years, the international HE system has been confronted with:

• the challenges of globalization (lots of pressure on university’s relevance),
• tough competition for limited resources (both financial and human resources),
• internationalisation’ orientation (of curricula, staff, students, etc)
• massification,
• institutional diversity,
• social accountability.

"Thus the emergence of international ranking schemes and global markets for researchers, research training and research products (...) has had profound effects on the perception of HEIs, of their possibilities and the urgency of their choices as well as of the characteristics needed to sustain a competitive HE system” (Reichert, 2009).

International ranking systems – limits

• Growing number of classifications, with some indicators overlapping – trend towards specialized classification (it might be relevant to question the rationale behind them: each new classification is trying to include new relevant indicators or...some of them are created as a response to the comprehensive ones, in an attempt to promote less relevant universities?)
  • Important focus on research output, while research quality is poorly differentiated;
  • Important focus on performance indicators, while non-performance indicators remain underrepresented;
• Research remains the favourite area of analysis, while teaching is just a Cinderella's of world rankings – most of the rankings, except the multi-ranking systems, cannot offer an accurate diagnosis of the HE institutions as a whole;
• Global ranking tend to favour universities from English-language nations because non-English language output is both published and cited less (van Raan et al, 2010)
• Limited access to raw information which could allow more extended comparative analysis of different rankings and, also, might contribute to the transparency's purpose;
• Several claims on data manipulation (the so-called gaming the ranking) in an attempt to force the inclusion of some universities in global rankings – data reliance is crucial;
The HE system response was...

- China's famous 211 and 985 programmes
- *Japan’s 21st Centre of Excellence Programme* (replaced by the *Global Centre of Excellence Programme*, in 2007)
- Germany's *Exzellenzinitiative*, launched in 2005, supported, with a multiannual financing system, 39 doctoral schools, 37 excellence clusters and 9 institutional strategies.

And the HEIs actions were...

- **In Slovenia – University of Maribor** - a HEI that chose regional and national societal relevance, by assessing properly its strengths. The international relevance was included in the quality assurance system, using EU quality standards as a benchmark for the university’s activity in teaching and research.
- **In UK – University of Lancaster** - is committed to maintain its top rankings in international systems, by clearly linking its operational plan and supporting strategies to the strategic plan, in order to accomplish its mission “to pursue research at the highest international level, creating new knowledge and expertly transmitting the benefits of this to our students, partners and users of our research”.
- **In South Korea - POSTECH's** is considered an unique example in the international HE's system - its main peculiarity derives from its position as a private university determined and able to achieve, over only past two decades, world-class status. It strategically focused on science and technology, deepening the existing staff’s expertise and widening the research teams by inviting highly performing scientists.
The Romanian HE system and the issue of excellence

In the last two decades, the system has undergone important changes in terms of:

- funding system,
- growing number of both public and private HE institutions,
- educational offer - the pressure of labour market,
- massification,
- international relevance.

Steps towards reaching excellence in Romanian HEIs

- Starting with year 2000, universities of Iassy and Cluj-Napoca in Romania were involved in the identification of criteria for a classification of Romanian universities.
- Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj Napoca, launching its Research Strategy in 2005, proposed as an ultimate goal, entering Top 500 of the Shanghai Ranking, until 2012 (program UBB 500).
- In 2008 - a Minister Ordinance was issued, in order to establish an "Institutional Development Fund" subjected to competition for universities aiming to become WCUs.
- In 2011 - the program for excellence of the Romanian universities (focus: reaching excellence asks for the appropriate legislative and financial framework).
- In 2012 - the first official university classification, with three categories: research based universities, universities for teaching and research and universities for teaching. Drawbacks: in order to provide the necessary data, most of the university were faced with not sufficient time to consolidate their data; the definition of the three categories, implicitly suggested difference in terms of quality and not respecting the principle of "parity of esteem" for international, national and local profile universities, and the methodology was not at all transparent.
In search for excellence. The case of University of Bucharest

- Founding year of institution: 1864
- Total number of students enrolled in 2012/2013: 32219
- Number of doctoral candidates counted as students: 2066
- Academic staff head count: 1281
- Number of faculties: 19
- Number of international programs: 81
- Number of doctoral schools: 21
- Incoming students in international exchange programs: 154
- Students sent out in international exchange programs: 265
- Students in international joint degree programs: 78
In search for excellence. The case of University of Bucharest

In 2012, an 8 year excellence programme was launched to improve the university’s performances and positioning in the most relevant international ranking systems:

- Defining excellence
- The analysis of the internal and international context
- Benchmarking, classification and ranking instruments
- Comprehensive analysis of the international ranking systems
- Comprehensive analysis of the national classification system
- Set of objectives to be accomplished for entering international ranking systems (including an action plan focused on the performance improvement)
- Limits/drawbacks…etc
- Organization or re-organization of UB to reach high level of performance
- Building confidence and support for the program among university staff
- Evaluation/assessment

The case of University of Bucharest. The Ranking Group

Roles of the Ranking Group of the University of Bucharest

I. to identify the most relevant international tendencies on ranking issues
II. to communicate to the academic community
III. to contribute to the support of strategic documents

Activities of documentations
Activities of transfer of information
Activities of creations of documentations
The Ranking Group – main activities

• I.1. the activity of self-preparation;
• I.2. the creation of a dedicated virtual library;
• II.1. activity of direct communication among the ranking group members and the faculty staff (debates);
• II.2. activity of large scale communication among the entire community members (Information Bulletin);
• II.3. activity of training on university management with two target groups: academic management and administrative staff;

Main difficulties....

• Most members of the ranking group are academics – little time to meet and discuss on the issues of ranking and excellence
• The effects of the institutional efforts and actions cannot be seen immediately, the increasing of quality and consequently of the visibility being a long term process, with its own ups and downs
• The utility of improved positioning of the university has to be explained in relationship with the individual status of the academic staff
• Legislative changes generate an unpredictable set of actions and priorities – lack of interest for visibility ends😊
The situation of UB

Many debates revealed the most important areas to concentrate on:

- scientific research – the scientific production, the research impact, the excellence in research
- academic reputation – active participation to international networking, peer review assessment, teaching assessment
- internationalization – foreign students and professors, international study programmes, foreign languages websites
- employability – feedback from employer, tracking mechanisms.

The situation of UB

The scope of identification of concrete actions was based on the understanding of the faculties’ potential:

- there is a huge potential to increase the scientific production, but very different among different domains
- there is a need of selection of publications, without giving up of the self-achievement – journals, interest subjects
- academics know very well where to publish, but they face a lack of financial support
- specific rules coming from legislation generate difficulties in attracting more international students and foreign professors
- graduates do not have a real interest to be part of the alumni association and to support the tracking system
The situation of UB

Some possible measures have been identified, such as:

- research stimulation policy
- international policy
- development of the alumni data base
- training sessions of the staff
- benchmarking analysis
The situation of UB
Phases from ideas to real change

Documentation phase of the ranking group
Information and communication among academic community
Identifying the current situation at an institutional level
Identifying possible way of actions to increase visibility
Establishing priorities by the university management
Construction of the strategic documents
Implementation of the strategic documents

The situation of UB
Relationship between the ranking group and the university management

Ranking group
Supports the university change
Create proposal documents for increasing visibility

University management
Supports the ranking group
Decide on strategic documents

integration
The situation of UB

- Comparison with other neighboring universities
- What do we lack?
- What we can improve in the immediate future?
- What is to be done on the long term?

The situation of UB - ARWU 2013

<table>
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<th>Uni</th>
<th>Alum</th>
<th>Award</th>
<th>HiCi</th>
<th>N&amp;SC</th>
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<th>PCP</th>
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Estimation based on simulated results
The situation of UB – QS 2013

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<th>Empl rep</th>
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<th>Cit/fac</th>
<th>Intnl fac</th>
<th>Intnl stud</th>
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The situation of UB- URAP 2013

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<td>45.74</td>
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And, the future...some ideas

- The construction of a research policy taking into consideration the need of increasing the research production at an institutional level – **benchmarks from rankings**
- The construction of an internationalization policy in order to attract more foreign students and professors, to develop many more international programmes - **benchmarks from rankings**
- The creation of a functional data base for the graduates in order to better articulate tracer systems - **benchmarks from rankings**
- The continuation of the information and communication processes on quality and university management through the publication of the Information Bulletin, at least once a semester and of the training sessions, at least once a year.

Conclusions

- Policy adapted to WCU concept
- Structural transformations needed – most difficult
- The construction of a research policy
- The construction of an internationalization policy – **key issue**
- The creation of a functional data base for the graduates in order to better articulate tracer systems
- The continuation of the information and communication processes on quality and university management through the publication of the Information Bulletin, at least once a semester and of the training sessions, at least once a year.
Thank you for your attention!

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