

**”BABEŞ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
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**”BABEŞ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ
BETWEEN THE FLOWS AND THE EBBS OF
THE COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY
DURING 1959-1972**

- Summary of the PhD thesis -

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Keywords: *university, communism, ideological speech, education, communist propaganda*

The history of the modern universities has represented a major concern for the researchers of the cultural historical phenomenon, both nationally and universally.

Through this theme we would like to reconstruct a page from the history of the university education in Cluj during the communist regime, specifically during 1959-1972. Our approach is first of all based on the importance that the university education has in the evolution of the modern society, in terms of forming the elites reported to the state involvement in the process of education.

We find the subject interesting because we are in a period in which the democratic evolution has been brutally interrupted, with the establishment of communism. Similar with the social, democratic and political fields, education has been strongly marked by the totalitarian footprint through ideology, through the removal of the inconvenient, through the rigid control of the state.

The established chronological landmarks (1959-1972) have as a starting point the foundation of "Babeş-Bolyai" University through the unification of "Victor Babeş" University and "Bolyai Janos" University, and the beginning of the cultural revolution. The present thesis has focused on a more complete and coherent reconstruction of the university facts and activities in parallel with the communist ideology. The history of the University does not actually have its own methodology, this research remaining at the disposal of the researcher, who can use a mixture of theories and techniques according to their own project. As a working method I have approached the investigation of the archive documents, which I have completed with information from specialized studies and general works, respectively, articles that appeared in the media of those times or with memoirs belonging to several personalities of those times.

The aim was to reconstruct the evolution of the university in Cluj as it is reflected in the archive documents in terms of communist ideology. The chapters of the research suggest two steps, two plans approaching the theme: a theoretical one, that synthesizes the key concepts of the subject, the political, economic, and social context of the period and the evolution of the Romanian education and a practical one that

highlights the evolution of "Babeş-Bolyai" University (during 1959-1972) as reflected by the documents of the time.

From a structural point of view the thesis is divided into four chapters. The first two represent one third of the work that contain the theoretical plan. Thus, the conceptual clarifications in the first chapter - defining a few basic terms that were useful for editing the work, e.g. the educational reform, the purification in the universities, the confessional education, the communist propaganda, the excessive politicization, communism and its directions - and the political and economic landmarks that are meaningful to that time (treated in the second chapter of the work) allowed us to surprise the impact that the communist regime had on "Babeş-Bolyai" University.

It is therefore obvious that at the beginning of the '60 the university was still under the influence of the soviet pedagogical model which has imposed itself, at least officially, on teachers. Unlike this orientation, after 1965 the effort towards the modernization of the exchange of information with the international academic communities manifest in a more significant manner. The teachers look more and more often toward what happens in Western Europe and in the U.S.A., they begin to gain a certain freedom in their teaching and in their research. Naturally these openings are though limited by the plans and the teaching programs that were set from the central.

Chapters III and IV - the basis of the research - contain the practical plan, represented by the analysis of the archival documents and occupy two thirds of the work.

In the third chapter named "*Babeş-Bolyai*" University between 1959 and 1972 I have followed the transformations that took place in the university after the unification, regarding the institutional organization, the teachers' professional body and its activity, the relationship with the foreign societies and also the impact of the communist ideology on the university activities. In a chronological order, the following changes took place at the institutional level: in 1961 the Faculty of Economics was founded, in 1962 the Pedagogical Institute of three years became part of the university and in the same year the Faculties of Mathematics and Physics split into two (from then on, the Faculty of Mathematics is called the Faculty of Mathematics-Mechanics), and during 1969-1970 two new faculties of the university are set up in Sibiu: the Faculty of Philology and History and the Faculty of Economics and Administration.

During 1959-1972 the evolution of the teachers has been characterized by a significant increase in number, which is closely related to the increase in number of students and the degree of professionalism (specializations, Ph.D.) and through a process of rejuvenation recorded especially after 1968. During 1968-1972 the problem of selection and promotion of the university teachers has been developed over three main directions: the rejuvenation of the staff by new personnel, the natural succession avoiding damaging fluctuations, and the creation of scientific and didactic schools.

The university activity was obviously subordinated to the political. The principle of democratic centralism in the practice of party life has been transferred to the academic environment as discussions, criticism and self-criticism serving political and ideological purposes. In spite of these ideological restraints the didactic and scientific performances of the teachers' professional body are ever more remarkable.

The impact of the ideology of the communist regime on the activity of the university is illustrated by the existence of a double language – a sincere one, shared among a limited number of acquaintances, friends and family members and another one used in public, demonstrating faithfulness to the party and its social and economic policies.

Having as a fundamental objective the enforcement of total control over society, the communist regime tried to impose its ideological monopoly on education in general, and particularly on superior education. The means of acting and the enforcement modalities of the ideological monopoly within the university environments were specified in the party's documents and in the legislation referring to education.

It is obvious that the 1959-1972 period was not linear from the perspective of the influence of the communist ideology on the university. The influence of the communist ideology manifested among the entire academic faculty and in all the domains of activity in the university, but the ideological footprint had a different intensity, depending on the commandments imposed by the regime at one point or another, or on the resistance degree of the professors or students. In that respect, for the period referred to, we may distinguish three stages which relate to the "ebbs and flows of the communist system": an ideology character endowment period which bears the hallmark of the last Stalinist spurts (1959-1964), a relaxation period, of liberalization, during which the ideological trammel is markedly diminished (1964-1971), and a third stage,

which opens in 1971 with the “cultural revolution” which leads gradually to the decline of the university life and affects the academic professional plane through the ideological plane. These chronological delimitations should not be considered rigidly, but rather just as guiding landmarks.

On the whole it is difficult to quantify the extent to which the ideological factor negatively influenced the university activity. From the perspective of the allotted time, the political and ideological activities constituted, there is no doubt, a drawback with regard to the proper development of the academic activity. The didactic activities, the courses, the seminars, the students’ scientific clubs, the research activity have also been hindered by the ideological factor from the perspective of the content, of the manifestation of the freedom of thought and conscience of the professors and students.

Beyond these considerable setbacks, if we don’t consider the ideological ballast, we reach the conclusion that, in that period, a battle for the survival of the values was fought within the University of Cluj and that specialists were formed who contributed to the progress of the Romanian society as much as it was possible for that historic epoch.

The concluding chapter of the thesis entitled *Aspects of students’ life in “Babeş-Bolyai” University between 1959 and 1972* is dedicated to the students and contains reference to the students’ scientific clubs, the social issues, the field and pedagogical practice, as well as the students’ health condition.

An important domain of the student activity targeting professional performance within the different specialties was represented by the activity of the students’ scientific clubs. These were structured according to faculties and developed activities for and during periodic meetings, every month, and their results were made public during scientific workshops. The recognition of the research value of the Cluj university students is illustrated by the great number of prizes awarded at national level.

Like in any other totalitarian state, in communist Romania, the student life was rigorously organized and supervised under all its aspects. An important form of regimentation and supervision was represented by the student associations. These were led by the party organizations and carried out their activity under the guidance of the U.T.M. [Y.W.U. - Youth Worker Union] (U.T.C. [C.Y.U. - Communist Youth Union] since 1965) organizations and were preoccupied by all the problems which concerned

the students' activity: grades, educational work, accommodation, hostels, canteens, scholarships, leisure, holidays, camps, trips.

An important part of the activities carried out by the students at the "Babeş-Bolyai" University during the investigated period was represented by student practice. Internship was developed according to two coordinates: field training and teaching practice.

In order to achieve an efficient education, of a "high scientific standard" as well as an organic unity of education, research, and production, the students of the superior education institutes would complete their specialty training through field training/practice. Its main objectives were: acquiring the basic knowledge and practice skills of an occupation in the students' domain of specialty; designing and constructing apparatuses, machinery for self-endowment or in response to orders and contracts; the production of goods to be retailed (micro-production, prototypes, zero series) or acquiring the necessary practical skills for specialty research.

In what concerns the teaching practice, it was carried out within the pre-university educational system, both in rural and urban schools. The activity of the graduates of "Babeş-Bolyai" University before 1959 in schools pointed out clearly that the scientific preparation in the chosen specialty was not enough for the students, and that they also needed a series of methodological knowledge. That aspect was remedied by The Ministry of Education and Culture which reorganized the pedagogical practice through Order No 2412 of September 1959.

After having consolidated its power through extremely tough repressive measures during the first decade of power exertion, the communist regime manifested more and more visibly its preoccupations for improving the working and living conditions of the population, and the students' life respectively. At ideological level, these preoccupations appear in the Directives of the 13th Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party [P.M.R.] in 1960 and the Directives of the 9th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party [P.C.R.] in 1965 and aimed at intensifying the prophylactic measures: anti-epidemics, hygiene and work safety measures, improving medical assistance in hospitals, building several modern, high capacity hospitals, endowing the sanitary network with medical apparatuses and instruments, improving the organization of medical assistance. Within "Babeş-Bolyai" University the objectives established in the

party documents are concretized in drafts of sanitary education plans for the young generation and in measures adopted by the University leadership and authorized institutions.

Similar to the other educational institutions countrywide, the University of Cluj had a fundamental mission: forming the “new man” with a good professional training, a man who had to stand for the socialist humanism. School was thus regarded as a “wealth of socialism”, fact which resulted from the new materialist concept of the world and society.

The capacity of a university to define its ideal represents the prerequisite of the ability of the respective institution to function under proper circumstances. If, between the two world wars, the slogan of the University of Cluj had been “the European idea”, fulfilling the ideals of Romania by pertaining to the European ideals, once the communist regime was instituted, a strong fracture was produced, felt especially during the Stalinist epoch when the entire activity of the university was confounded. In the period under research, the university ideal oscillated between the propagandistic clichés imposed by the regime (the development of the material and spiritual life of the people, politicization, and regimentation) and the promotion of the authentic values professed by the personalities of that age who would have liked the university to have the possibility to become a center of scientific research around which the professors could raise people.

Just like the entire Romanian society, the University of Cluj evolved within a historical context following the destiny- sometimes happy, but sometimes sad- of the Romanian community. During the period we referred to, ”Babeş-Bolyai” University assumed the role of preserving and handing down knowledge, and at the same time that of stimulating original scientific research, becoming thus “the means by which society is ceaselessly renewing the conditions of its own existence” (Emile Durkheim).

Without resorting to sentences and mythologies, our endeavor was beacons by the conviction that restituting a period from the past of the University of Cluj can contribute to bringing into the present those who maintained the prestige of that academic institution during a period when any career, title or academic distinction depended on the final decision of the politics. Thus the teachers’ professional body carried out its activity swerving among collaboration, compromise, and resistance,

under pressure conditions. It was a period when the options of the intellectuals within the “new order” were either submission by serving the new regime, or disappearance through complete silence.