

**ACCEPTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION
PROGRAMS. PUBLIC POLICIES AND UNIVERSITY STRATEGIES IN ROMANIA
AND BULGARIA**

SUMARRY

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In modern society, the quality of education plays a fundamental role in its development. In this context, universities must adapt to new needs and challenges in order to remain relevant and useful. Modern society is characterized by an increase in complexity and diversity, and for this, universities wish to attract the public interest service given by education and research, through a wide spectrum of disciplines. In order to fully fulfill this service, the main mission for universities is to prepare all students for the labor market in modern society. To this end, universities can offer hands-on and interdisciplinary education programs, encourage off-campus learning experiences, and ensure adequate preparation for careers in both STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and other fields of economic growth. In addition, universities are challenged to provide solutions to complex problems, from climate change to social inequality.

In addition, the increased internationalization of economic and commercial relations obliges higher education institutions to create and implement coordination matrices, which can contribute to the development of the curriculum, to the recruitment of students, to the employment of academic resources, in order to access and participate in international projects. There are already many examples of good practices through which has been developed and ensured the continuous advisory activity for university management in the field of international student recruitment services. As an example of good practice, it could be mentioned here, the activity of continuously monitoring the applications of future international students, submitted during international fairs.

The intercultural and international dimension is manifested in all areas of operation of the university. Internationalization in situ can be considered a starting point. This, nowadays, can be achieved by creating teams in a virtual environment. Online remote communication can unite international and interdisciplinary teams by eliminating geographical barriers. In the context of COVID-19, the educational process designed according to the new social challenges, represents an effective communication strategy and gives value to the development policies for internationalization in universities. The education transmitted through digital methods produces and facilitates the intercultural communication of students, creating real challenges for teachers,

in the direction of global awareness and cultural immersion. International diversity can contribute to enriching the cultural experience for students, who no longer have to travel, but can be recruited in international teams for a medium or long term. Communication in an international language helps the development of students' linguistic skills, thus contributing to their professional training. There are many examples of virtual collaboration and participation in interdisciplinary teams of students.

The university's objective is to establish partnerships within the community it belongs to and for which it trains specialists, through the development of networks that increase the involvement of young people in the socio-economic environment. Social partnerships are a part of the university's active marketing. There are a few main aspects in the internationalization policy of the university, like presenting the educational offer to multinational companies, establishing opportunities for student scholarships, getting involved in national projects. For a durable development it is important to carefully study the target group, to be able to anticipate their needs.

Emphasis on individuality and identity is another part of a university's strategy, necessary both for promotion and for attracting foreign students. More precisely, it considers aspects related to the promotion of diversity and inclusion, but also those corresponding to combating discrimination of any kind . If an attempt is made to apply a treatment that identifies students as belonging to a group, then there is a risk that they will suffer from the inappropriate behavior of others. This creates a feeling of marginalization, which harms both individuals and the university. That is why the association with a group of a certain ethnicity is done by the university with great caution. If the students find their place in the university's society, they will certainly pass on their beneficial experiences for personal development, thus encouraging other compatriots and not only, to follow their example. The difference in culture, ethnicity, sex, age, are aspects that are the basis of any political-strategic approach of the university, in order to instill the applicants, whether internal or external, with the desire to study at a particular university.

The graduation rate and the degree of student satisfaction are two starting points in choosing the form of study for future students. However, an increasingly widespread indicator has appeared, namely the resource utilization rate. All these indicators are the basis of university management.

On another level, the involvement of digitization in attracting students, the creation of useful mobile applications, contributes to increasing the level of information for students, but also to their comfort. Having information about all the resources available on campus and in the university, easily accessing the contact details of the teaching and administrative staff, and thus being able to schedule their informal activities based on the information obtained, actually achieves what university marketing aims to: promotion through communication. Making podcasts that allow the dissemination of student experiences, the desire to actively popularize student teams and student leagues is a good strategy, because, as is known, on campus there is an intense socialization between students of the same nationalities. All these common experiences are successfully exploited and encouraged by universities in order to attract other students from the home countries of those who have created a status based on comfort, safety and support from the host university. In internationalization, the notion of campus acquires a new dimension, that of interculturality. To encourage it, the activities and needs of international students can be monitored so that they feel helped, respected and supported. As a result of these actions, a relationship of trust is created and developed, which can later constitute a good business card for those who will want to study in that university.

Another aspect that contributes to increasing the rate of absorption of international students is offering a degree of freedom to teachers, who contribute to the development of the university's environment, both through teaching and research activities, and through the implementation of good practices, which they have learned in the interaction with the academic environments of the partner universities.

Lifelong learning is an important component that leads to good results in popularizing the educational offer. Postgraduate courses and associate degrees are two aspects that universities rely on, thus having the possibility of continuous and rapid adaptation to society's needs.

In the context of globalization, the state, although trying to exert limited influence in higher education, still benefits from this internationalization. If there is real competitiveness, then the professional insertion of graduates will be high, and the benefits commensurate. To achieve good results in the internationalization process, it is imperative to ensure quality in education, encourage research and develop university services. The reduced involvement of the state could be replaced

by the involvement of economic actors in financing, but also by the attraction of an important financial force, provided by the fees of foreign students.

The present paper represents an analysis that moves from a Western paradigm based on the multidimensional and progressive development of internationalization, to its particularities in higher education in former communist countries, in restricted fields of study. This contributes to the ever-widening discussions, as can be seen from studies made by specialists, which reflect local needs and priorities. The paper thus crosses the barrier of internationalization research in terms of a global paradigm, revising the relationship between internationalization and other significant aspects. I have thus attempted, as for a field of national and international interest, like oil and gas education, to explain the disruptions caused by global geopolitics, gender identity and equality, multiculturalism, ethics, sustainability, decolonization and 'sanitizing the curriculum'. Basically, the multiple facets of internationalization that give evolution or involution were reaffirmed. I aimed, starting from a process approach, to find the pivotal activities that lead to an increase in the degree of absorption of foreign students, to the characterization and integration of commercialization activities in education for the purpose of purely economic benefits. The internal and external aspects, pivots of internationalization, are part of a critical reflection on internationalization, which needed a comparative study in two similar countries, in order to support what specialist studies say can be developed, namely the internationalization activity, which you transform, even if only partially, into "interculturalization". Thus, the empirical research based on the comparative study between two universities, with a unique profile in their countries, namely geology in the oil and gas industry, is meant to be an interpretation of the existing situation in the context of current constraints.

The right political decisions can thus make the difference between the possibility of developing higher education in Romania and Bulgaria versus competition from the European Union. The absorption of a large number of people from outside Europe into the European Union is obvious.

In this context, the countries of the former communist bloc appear as the main challengers of Western internationalization, because, although they try to copy the Western paradigm through their strategies, they do not have a larger number of international students as was the case before the 1990s. Two countries similar to the dominance of the previously mentioned university model

are Romania and Bulgaria. Both countries are members of the European Union, having been accepted into the European Union at the same time, being located in the Eastern European region and identifying themselves as member states of the former communist bloc. In both countries, the higher education system is administered by the state, but there are also private universities. The higher education is offered at the bachelor's and master's level, while the doctorate is available for those interested. Both in Romania and in Bulgaria, universities are involved in research and development activities and there is a significant number of foreign students pursuing their higher education.

Thus, the objective of the research is to identify/verify the theory that underlies internationalization in order to develop strategies to counteract the fragmented, uncoordinated and ad hoc way in which internationalization is treated. I thus tried to find the dominant paradigm that would provide a new framework in which the role and social responsibility of the internationalization of higher education could evolve. The higher education institutions with the same profile in the two countries are already collaborating, to strengthen the teaching and research capacities of the partner institutions in many specializations. But these valuable activities are often marginalized in the context of the overwhelming focus of internationalization strategies on attracting more international students. It was thus important to compare two institutions with a solid reputation, which are subjected to the same types of national and international pressures, in the context of EU membership, which have roughly the same social responsibilities that need to be developed and supported under the most equitable conditions. In this context, the two institutions were: University of Mining and Geology "St. Ivan Rilski" (UMG "ST.IVAN RILSKI"), Bulgaria and Petrol-Gas University of Ploiesti (PGU Ploiesti), Romania.

The University of Mining and Geology "St. Ivan Rilski" (UMG) was founded in 1953. UMG is the only higher education institution in Bulgaria that offers high-quality university studies in prospecting, mining and processing of minerals and energy resources.

Petroleum -Gas University of Ploiesti was founded in 1948. It is accredited for a number of 34 bachelor programs, 32 master programs and 4 doctoral programs. The quality of the specialists trained at the Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti (under its various names) has made it known and appreciated all over the world.

The age of these two higher education institutes, the number of international students and the study programs, allow a comparative analysis of substance, whose role is not a momentary conclusion, but the understanding of a phenomenon in its depth. Through this we can see if our neighboring countries are more attractive for international students and how we can increase their absorption in the current conditions.

Thus, at the end of the study, a correlation was found between the local, national, regional and global objectives of internationalization, by defining new parameters for a responsible approach, which involves paying more attention to the internationalization of this narrow but strategic field of study, nationally. Alignment with other levels of education can lead to a deeper approach to the international dimensions of social responsibility. This is even more important than before given today's complex geopolitical tensions and challenges related to health, society and environment. Shifting our understanding of internationalization from a Western, competitive paradigm to a global cooperative strategy is now an imperative for the coming years. We thus found that internationalization in the two universities is influenced by a combination of conjunctural and structural factors, which include changes in government policies and educational legislation, the increase of international demands for high-quality education, the availability and accessibility of new technologies, the development of strategies and international programs as well as developing partnerships and relationships with universities and institutions around the world. My contribution in defining some indicators to measure the degree of internationalization for higher education in Romania is intended to simplify the approach to the internationalization process pragmatically and to contribute to the construction of a new paradigm.

It is also possible to determine an optimal class composition that can build positive outcomes by maximizing group diversity while also preventing individual isolation.

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