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QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENROLMENTS IN ROMANIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A b s t r a c t

After the fall of the Romanian communist regime in December 1989, the higher education system underwent structural changes. We can link the process with the developments from the last two decades of socialism. Even though state-subsidised, the total number of study places dropped significantly, especially for social studies and Humanities. Also, due to demographical policies in the late 1960s, the number of potential higher-education candidates increased remarkably. We can also add fierce ideological pressure as well as politechnisation. In this sense, two factors have explanatory value for the post-1989 evolutions. One developed from an increasing social demand for higher education (with generations trying to catch up after the politically imposed limitation was eliminated). The second one commenced from the need for a suitable legislative framework for the newly emerged democratic state.

Consequently, during the first years of post-socialism, the entire system of Romanian higher education went through a period of expansion. The transition implied establishing a private tertiary education sector and an increased allocation of study places within public universities. Naturally, the expansion was not uniform as previously marginalised study programs, such as those from social sciences and humanities significantly detrimental to others that the Communist regime preferred.

After the significant expansion of public and private higher education during the 1990s and most of the 2000s, an abrupt and considerable collapse arose. Usher and Williams (2022) explain that „between 2009 and 2013, enrolments in Romanian higher education underwent one of the largest collapses ever seen in peacetime anywhere in the world. In terms of enrolments, the fall was over 50% in just four years (a product of both demographic transition and the aftermath of the Spiru Haret University affair)”. It should be underlined that the result is part of a broader set of problems concerning Romanian society and economy, especially demography. Also, high dropout rates in primary and secondary education and a spectacular decrease in yearly Baccalaureate diploma holders added further problems.

This report aims to quantify the enrolments in Romanian higher education institutions during the post-socialist transition. Given the strong entanglements with the pre-1989 phenomena, our database starts with the 1988/1989 academic year and aims to collect as much data as possible for the post-socialist period. Our objective is to break down the data, when available, to different study programmes, levels, types of tertiary education and others.

Only a few significant contributions in the literature related to this topic exist. Therefore, further qualitative analyses and a detailed reconstruction of the Romanian higher education system's quantitative evolutions in post-socialism are still required. The data collected and analysed in this report will be put in the broader context, including, but not limited to: modifications in higher education legislation or the economic context. This report proposes four main stages for the history of post-socialist Romanian higher education:

- Ample expansion of student enrolment and diversification of HEIs (1990 – 1995/1996);
- A new legal framework and expansion under drivers of Europeanization (1995/1996 - 2008);
- Economic and demographic constraints and the decline of private HEIs (2009 - 2016);
- Massive increase of public funding in HEIs and further decline of secondary education graduates (2017 - present);

Among the first results, in the bigger picture of the expansion of higher education, some subtle evolutions are underrepresented in the literature. The preliminary results of this research report argue that, while there was a general expansion of enrolments to Romanian higher education institutions during the first years of the post-socialist transition, we underline subtle evolutions.

Firstly, the day students became common among all higher education institutions. If before 1989 they represented almost half of all students, afterwards mainly all enrollments were for day students. We can link this to the downfall of evening students, from representing around a third of the total student population in the last years of the communist regime to almost total dissolution.

Second, the expansion from the 1990s was not homogenously distributed in the Romanian higher education system. This is especially relevant when comparing the relative and absolute evolutions between different fields of study. The number of students in Technical study fields dropped from 71.0% (1988/1989) to 28.1% (1995/1996) in relative numbers. After some years of increase, the decrease was 20.04%, from 113.185 to 94.289. In Medicine and Pharmacy, the number of students increased by 48.19% from 1989/1990 to 1995/1996, even though at the relative level, the percentage even decreased by 0.88%. In Economics, the total number of students increased 5.6 times between 1988/1989 to 1995/1996, from 15.949 to 83.396. The percentage of students at the relative level increased from 9.4% (1988/1989) to 25% (1994/1995). In Law, the number of students grew 18.5 times, from 2.332 (1988/1989) to 43.143 (1995/1996). The percentage of Law students in the general student population raised from 1.5% (1988/1989) to 12.8% (1995/1996). Concerning Comprehensive and pedagogical education, the number of students grew five times, from 15.085 (1988/1989) to 76.729 (1995/1996). The percentage of students enrolled in these disciplines increased significantly from 9.5% (1988/1989) to 22.8% (1995/1996). The number of students in Physical education increased by 1037.43%. In comparison, those enrolled in Artistical study programs grew by 524.67%, but these results result from very few enrolments in these fields of study during the communist regime.

Third, this report considers that higher education institutions in Romania have a different design than in other EHEA state members, as there is a scarcity of hybrids or short-cycle institutions.

The main limitations of this research report are related to two main factors. First of all, while the data available is strictly quantitatively significant, its analysis is complicated by the essential variations in how data was collected, processed, and presented and how items were defined and selected. This makes the creation of a homogenous database of enrolments in Romanian institutions of higher education during post-socialism difficult and time-consuming. Second, given the significant structural changes, including from a legislative point of view, within the Romanian higher education system after 1990, identifying relevant variables for the quantitative analysis needs to

be revised. The report addresses this limitation by focusing on four (sub)periods and proposing a more fragmented narrative related to post-socialist Romanian higher education.