

International University Networks and Academic Mobility in Political Context: Six decades of cooperation between “Babeş-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca and the University of Geneva (1919-1979)

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyse academic mobility and other forms of scientific cooperation against a larger political background. The relations between “Babeş-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca and the University of Geneva, between 1919 and 1979, were marked by radical political changes. The shifting international context had a particularly great impact on the Romanian institution, which made a difficult transition from a democratic to a totalitarian regime after World War II.

In the first part of the paper, we identified contacts between the Romanian University in Cluj and the Swiss academic community during the interwar period (1919-1939). It was a favourable period for international scientific collaboration, when a “tradition” of cooperation between the universities of Cluj and Geneva was born. The second part of the paper is focused on the various forms of cooperation between the two institutions in the following decades (1939-1979), with a special emphasis on academic mobility. A significant moment was the signing of a cooperation convention in 1971. The information provided by official documents issued by the two universities during the following years reveals the numerous obstacles they faced in their efforts to implement the provisions of the convention.

Keywords: “Babeş-Bolyai” University, University of Geneva, university networks, academic mobility, higher education, communism

Introduction

Academic mobility, in its various forms of manifestation, is an important aspect in many fields of research, including the history of higher education. It is generally perceived as a socio-professional process connected to scientific networking, collaboration and internationalization of research and education. Today, mobility is a dominant aspect of academic life, but the roots of this phenomenon are very old (Welch, 2008). Throughout my research I have addressed the concept of “academic mobility” in a wider sense, which includes not only permanent or long term relocation of scholars, but also medium and short term direct contacts with foreign institutions. International conferences, invited lectures, research grants and scholarships awarded by foreign institutions can be considered types of “scholarly mobility”.

Communication in science is transactional, and is achieved through interactions, be them personalized (face-to face) or depersonalized (indirect) (Oleinik, 2014). Academic travels were, and still are, the best way of expanding scientific networks based on personalized interactions. Both types of interactions have increased over the course of the 20th century, with a significant intensification after World War I. In the second half of the 20th century, the expansion of scientific networks reached an unprecedented level. Cooperation between universities and research institutes overcame geographical, political and cultural boundaries, leading to the formation of international research teams and generating thus a transition from “little science” to “big science” (Beaver, 2001).

Scientific ideas, as well as research and education methods, are influenced by the social environment in which they take shape. Knowledge is generated and validated within large intellectual communities, which have been labelled as “invisible colleges” (Crane, 1972). In addition, these webs of communication have always been influenced by the political context. The state of international relations has always impacted scientific cooperation and transnational academic mobility (Kim, 2009). This is also the main premise of this study.

The Romanian University of Cluj and its Contacts with the Swiss Academic Community between the two World Wars (1919-1939)

During the interwar period, the University of Cluj started building a network of international cooperation that expanded all over Europe and beyond. The construction of this institutional network was based on the intricate webs of personal connections developed by the founding professors, before World War I. The Romanian intellectual elite had strong ties with the French academic community, thus the first international contacts of the University of Cluj were established with institutions from this country. The overwhelming influence of the French academic world is demonstrated by the significant number of French professors who worked at the University of Cluj, especially during the first decades of its existence. Short term academic travels were also dominated by the French professors. Between 1926 and 1935, 91 foreign specialists delivered lectures in Cluj, with more than half of them (47) representing French institutions. Among the other 44 lecturers, five came from Switzerland (Sergescu, 1937).

The Swiss professors who travelled to Cluj during this period (1925-1935) were: Karl Jaberg, a linguist from the University of Bern; Eugène Pittard, a famous anthropologist, founder of the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Geneva; Edouard Chapuisat, an economist from the University of Geneva (AUC, 1924-1925); William Rappard, the director of the Institute of High International Studies in Geneva (AUC, 1930-1931) and Hans W. Hartman, professor and journalist at the "Neue Züricher Zeitung", who held a conference on the medieval fortifications in Switzerland (AUC, 1934-1935). One year later, in 1936, Professor Rolin Wavre, a mathematician from the University of Geneva, held a conference at the Faculty of Sciences of the University in Cluj (AUC, 1936-1937). Four of the six Swiss professors, who travelled to Cluj during the interwar period, came from Geneva.

Pierre A. Chappuis, a Swiss biologist educated at the University of Bern, was one of the close collaborators of Emil Racoviță. He had a significant contribution to the organization of the Speleology Institute in Cluj. From 1922 to 1940, Chappuis was also a professor at the University of Cluj (Breazu, 2019; AUC, 1934-1935).

The academic mobility from Cluj to Switzerland was more intense, and it involved a larger range of situations. The most important group of academics who created connections between the two communities was represented by the Romanians who studied in Switzerland and later became professors at the University in Cluj. Ioan Grintescu, professor of botany in Cluj, obtained a diploma in pharmacy at the University of Geneva in 1898 and continued his studies at the same university until 1903. He was also a member of the Helvetic Society for Natural Sciences (AUC, 1934-1935). Gheorghe Pamfil, professor of technical and pharmaceutical chemistry, obtained his PhD at the University of Geneva in 1911. During the following two years, he continued his work at the Swiss University (AUC, 1929-1930). Gheorghe Sofronie, professor of international law, studied in Geneva, as a fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation. In the following years he published several articles on international law in the *Revue de Droit International*, edited at the University of Geneva (AUC, 1935-1936). Radu Bădescu, from the Faculty of Sciences in Cluj, obtained a title of doctor in mathematics at the University in Geneva (AUC, 1938-1939). In addition, a few other professors from Cluj, were elected members of Swiss Scientific Societies: Gheorghe Spacu (World Academy of Sciences, Geneva) (AUC, 1931-1932), Constantin Urechia (Swiss Society of Neurology and Psychiatry) (AUC 1934-1935) and Gheorghe Popoviciu (International Association of Preventive Paediatrics, Geneva) (AUC, 1937-1938).

Scholarly traveling towards Geneva was encouraged by the fact that this city was the headquarters of the League of Nations. Many scientific and cultural events were initiated by this intergovernmental organization that attracted scholars from around the world. International conferences were a good opportunity to establish connections abroad but, because of financial difficulties, only a small percentage of the teaching staff at the University in Cluj was able to benefit from such a professional experience. Coriolan Petranu, professor of art history in Cluj, attended the XIV International Congress of Art History in Switzerland, in 1936. On this occasion he became a collaborator of two prestigious Swiss reviews, *Die Neue Pallas* and *Nachrichtenblätter für Kunst und Archäologie*, both edited in Geneva (AUC, 1937-1938). In 1937, Mihail Zolog, represented the Hygiene Institute from Cluj at the Conference of the Directors of Hygiene Institutes from Europe, organized by the League of Nations (AUC, 1937-

1938). The Faculty of Medicine was represented by Gheorghe Popoviciu at the International Congress for the pedagogy of children with special educational needs. During the same year he attended another international event, organized by the League of Nation in Geneva, on the topic of rural life (AUC, 1938-1939). Ioachim Crăciun, history professor and librarian, attended The XV International Congress on Scientific Documentation in Zürich, in 1939. On this occasion he also performed work visits to some of the largest Swiss libraries in Zürich, Bern and the Library of the League of Nations in Geneva (AUC, 1938-1939).

Exchange of publications between university libraries was another important strategy of international scientific cooperation in the interwar period. It was the most efficient way of transferring knowledge between centres of research and education around the world. For a young institution of higher education, such as the University of Cluj, book donations and exchanges were extremely important. Between 1925 and 1935, a significant amount of foreign scientific literature was received by the University library in Cluj: 18.203 volumes were sent from France, 4.747 from Germany, 748 from Switzerland and 341 from the United States of America (Sergescu, 1937). *Mathematica*, a review edited by a collective from the Faculty of Sciences, was exchanged with similar publications from all over Europe and America. Issues of this publication were regularly sent to the University of Geneva and, in exchange, issues of the *Archives des Sciences Physiques et Naturelles* were sent to Cluj (AUC, 1936-1937).

The Botanical Garden and Museum of the university were very well connected on an international level. In a few years the teaching staff and researchers of these departments were able to build a vast network of cooperation that included many European and North-American institutions. In Switzerland, good relations were established with the Botanical Museum in Geneva, the *Botanical Museum A. Guyot* in Basel and the *Conservatoire Botanique de la Ville de Genève* (AUC, 1935-1936). Although World War II had already begun, Alexandru Borza, the director of the Botanical Garden in Cluj, travelled to Geneva where he held lectures at the University and the Botanical Society (AUC, 1940-1941).

All the above mentioned examples indicate strong connections between the Romanian University of Cluj and similar Swiss institutions during the decades that separated the two World Wars. A tradition of cooperation was built especially with the University of Geneva.

Academic mobility and exchange of publications were the most important ways of building connections between the two centres of research and education.

Relations between the Universities of Cluj and Geneva from World War II until the Signing of the Cooperation Agreement in 1971

The end of World War II brought significant political changes in Romania. The communist regime had a profound impact on all aspects of life. Universities lost their traditional freedom and scientific research was strictly controlled by central authorities. The political division symbolized by the “iron curtain” was also felt in the field of academic cooperation. Contacts with universities and research institutes from the so called “capitalist countries” were drastically reduced.

The situation began to change during the 1960s. Romania made efforts to rebuild its diplomatic and economic relations with western European countries. In 1962, Switzerland was the first country, outside the “Soviet Bloc”, where the new Romanian regime organized an embassy. Relations between the two states improved constantly over the following years. An important milestone was reached in 1969 when the Swiss federal councillor, Willy Spühler, visited Romania. Scientific and cultural cooperation between the two countries was an important issue discussed during the official meetings (Chinezu, 2011).

Between 1965 and 1971, the communist regime in Romania went through a phase of so called “liberalization”. Political relations with non-communist states were significantly improved and, as a consequence, academic contacts with democratic countries were re-established. However, academic mobility was limited and strictly controlled. Communist authorities recognized, in principle, the importance of international scientific cooperation and its impact on national education, research and economic development. Cultural and scientific agreements between Romanian and foreign institutions were accepted but under the strict supervision of central authorities. It was estimated that during 1960-1965, 900 Romanian specialists benefited from professional experience abroad, of which 437 were higher education teaching staff and researchers of the Romanian Academy, and the rest

were employed in the industrial sector. Certain fields of research with direct applicability (physics, electronics, geophysics, economy) were favoured because industry was considered a national priority (Berindei, Dobrinicu, Goşu, 2012, doc. 18).

International mobility improved significantly over the following years. This situation was reflected, for example, by the increased number of Romanian scholars who applied for Humboldt Fellowship Programs (Jöns, 2003). During the academic year 1965-1966, 683 Romanian specialists travelled abroad: 167 benefited from scholarships awarded by international organizations (UN and UNESCO), 130 were involved in exchange programs between research institutions (including universities) and the rest (386) represented the industrial sector. Although economic activities were still a priority, it is relevant to note that most travels, including the academic ones, were directed towards “capitalist countries” (83.1%). For the following year, professional travels abroad were planned, once again, according to the needs of the economy: 40% technical sciences, 14% mathematics and physics, 13% medicine and biology, 12% agriculture, 12% humanities and social sciences and 3% arts and culture (Berindei, Dobrinicu, Goşu, 2012, doc. 38).

Rigid planning, a dominant feature of the communist regime in Romania, was also affecting the fields of research and higher education alike. Nevertheless, the political context improved considerably and Romanian universities were able to rebuild and to expand their international networks of cooperation. Between 1965 and 1972, “Babeş-Bolyai” University signed cooperation agreements with several foreign universities: Strasbourg (France), Freiburg (German Federal Republic), Sarajevo (Yugoslavia), Zagreb (Yugoslavia), Teheran (Iran), Cracow (Poland), Geneva (Switzerland), Valparaiso (Chile), Brno (Czechoslovakia), Colorado (USA) and Pécs (Hungary) (Vese, 2012).

1971-1979

A long tradition of cooperation and a favourable political context led to the signing of an official agreement between “Babeş-Bolyai” University in Cluj and the University of Geneva on 27th May 1971. More than five decades of relations between the two institutions and the

willingness of the communist regime in Romania to consolidate political, economic and cultural ties with countries beyond the “iron curtain” completely justified such an act. However, during the same year, Nicolae Ceaușescu returned from his visits to North Korea and China, and the political situation in Romania was about to change. Inspired by his Asian comrades, Ceaușescu decided to implement a “cultural revolution” based on the revival of Marxist-Leninist education, reduction of foreign influence and an increased ideological control over cultural and scientific activities (Cătănuș, 2005).

This new political situation had a strong impact on the implementation of the cooperation agreement between the two universities. The convention consisted of five articles referring to: exchange of scientific material and publications and a regular exchange of teaching staff. Two types of mobility were specifically mentioned: short term mobility – consisting of a two weeks stay at the guest university for one or two specialists every year, and long term mobility – consisting of a yearly exchange of one or two specialists who were expected to spend one whole academic year at the guest university (AUBB, Rector’s Office, box 2, file 2, f. 1-3).

Both partners made constant efforts to respect the provisions of the convention but the Romanian communist authorities raised many obstacles in their way. The first years were the most difficult. The regular exchange of research and teaching staff was almost completely obstructed. According to official documents, one exception was made in 1973, when a member of the Physics department from Cluj spent 10 months at the University of Geneva (AUBB, Rector’s Office, box 1, file 5, f. 250).

In 1974, during a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, the subject of travels abroad for academic purpose was discussed. A radical change of attitude among authorities is revealed by the official report issued on this occasion. The scholarships offered by the Swiss state are specifically mentioned, but Ceaușescu himself insisted that he should have the final call on which were the fields of research who would benefit from this exchanges and the persons selected for the exchange programs. Social sciences were excluded from all forms of external contacts with foreign countries, regardless of their political orientation, and priority was given to

technology, medicine and biology (Berindei, Dobrinu, Goşu, 2016, doc. 36).

The situation began to change in 1976 due to repeated pleas sent by representatives of the University of Geneva. They were expressing a genuine interest in their cooperation with the Romanian university, and their partners from Cluj-Napoca (in 1974 the official name of the city changed from Cluj to Cluj-Napoca), were also very eager to resume their contacts with the Swiss institution. Ion Vlad, Rector of “Babeş-Bolyai” University at the time, made constant efforts to convince the Ministry of Education that cooperation with Geneva would be of great benefit for his institution. He invoked the convention signed in 1971, an act that was sanctioned by the Romanian government at the time, and made a short overview of the few achievements made during this period: one long term mobility in 1973 and a discontinuous exchange of correspondence and publications (AUBB, Rector’s office, box 1, file 5, f. 250).

André Hurst, professor from the Faculty of Letters in Geneva and renowned specialist in Mycenaean civilization, visited Cluj-Napoca during the autumn of 1976. On this occasion he held several lectures at “Babeş-Bolyai” University and at the University of Bucharest. During the same year, Professor Hadrian Daicoviciu, travelled to Switzerland and held lectures in Geneva, Fribourg and Lausanne. Two other members of the Faculty of Letters from Cluj-Napoca travelled to Geneva in 1976, in response to an invitation sent by George Steiner, the famous writer and linguist, who was teaching at the University of Geneva since 1974 (AUBB, Rector’s office, box 1, file 5, f. 247-249).

Erwin Parthe, director of the Laboratory of X Ray Crystallography, from the University of Geneva, travelled to Cluj-Napoca in late March 1977. His lectures were attended by many Romanian specialists in Cluj-Napoca and in Bucharest. He was also entrusted with the task of offering a one year scholarship at the University of Geneva and a substantial material contribution for the Faculty of Chemistry in Bucharest (AUBB, Rector’s office, box 1, file 5, f. 217, 218, 244).

On 4th March 1977, Romania was struck by a devastating earthquake. The Rector of “Babeş-Bolyai” University informed his Swiss colleague about this tragic event and asked for help in rebuilding the lost scientific patrimony (AUBB, Rector’s office, box 1, file 5, f. 169). Justin Thorens, the Rector of the University of Geneva responded with

solidarity, but only one year later was he able to send a large book donation to Cluj-Napoca, consisting of 1.501 volumes (AUBB, Rector's office, box 1, file 5, f. 169).

In 1978 "Babeş-Bolyai" University received another guest from Geneva. Peter Martin was the former Rector of the Swiss university who signed the convention in 1971. His return to Cluj-Napoca, after seven years, was meant to symbolize a renewal of contacts between the two institutions. During discussions with his Romanian colleagues, Peter Martin noticed that Physics and History were the two domains which benefited most from the cooperation between the two universities. He also expressed his disappointment with the inability of the Romanian institution to respect the provisions of the convention (AUBB, Rector's office, box1, file 5, f. 145-150).

This official visit produced a certain effect and, during the same year, mobility between the two universities reached an unprecedented level. The administration of the university in Cluj-Napoca initiated formalities for sending two young specialists to Geneva for one year, but central authorities were hesitant and delayed their final decision. Six students from the Faculty of Letters in Geneva travelled to Cluj-Napoca and, under the supervisor of Professor Hadrian Daicoviciu, participated in archaeological excavations at Sarmizegetusa Regia and Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (AUBB, Rector's office, box1, file, f. 85). Vladimir Hanga, honorary dean of the Law Faculty in Cluj-Napoca, travelled to Geneva as member of the International Committee for Human Rights. On this occasion he also visited the University of Geneva and held a lecture entitled: *Actualité du droit romain* (AUBB, Rector's office, box 1, file 5, f. 65). Invited by the Association of Swiss-Romanian Friendship, Hadrian Daicoviciu was in Geneva on the 1st of December 1978. He held a lecture entitled: *Le double nom des Daco-Gétes*, during an event dedicated to the celebration of 60 years from the Great Union of Romania (AUBB, Rector's office, box 1, file 5, f. 64).

The progressive trend was maintained in 1979, when four professors from Geneva visited "Babeş-Bolyai" University. Lucien Dällenbach, dean of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Geneva, arrived in Cluj-Napoca on the 28 May and stayed until the 1st of June. During his short stay he was involved in several activities with the Faculty of Philology, especially with the Department of French Language

and Literature, where he held a lecture on the works of Honoré de Balzac. He also had a meeting with the Romanian literary critic, Adrian Marino (AUBB, Rector's office, box 1, file 5, f. 28). Other professors from Geneva who came to Cluj-Napoca during this year were: Ivo Rens (historian and jurist), Alberto Munari (psychologist) and Michelangelo Flückiger (psychologist) (AUBB, Rector's office, box 1, file 5, f. 26).

In the official correspondence between the two universities in 1979, André Hurst is mentioned as head of a Commission for the cooperation with "Babeş-Bolyai" University. He was entrusted with the coordination of all activities established in the convention signed in 1971, a document that was recognised by the Swiss federal authorities. This was yet another indication that the University of Geneva was investing a significant amount of time and resources in developing its relations with its Romanian partner institution (AUBB, Rector's office, box 1, file 5, f. 3).

The repeated visits of Swiss scholars to Cluj-Napoca and the regular requests sent by the Rector of the "Babeş-Bolyai" University determined the authorities from Bucharest to accept, in principle, the cooperation between the two institutions. On 29th July, the *Office for External Relations and Foreign Students* from the Ministry of Education approved a mobility of 3 months for two specialists from the university in Cluj-Napoca to Geneva. A larger delegation, representing the leadership of "Babeş-Bolyai" University, was allowed to travel for 5 days to Geneva. A similar approval, for ten days, was given to a group of ten members of the teaching staff representing various faculties (AUBB, Rector's office, box 2, file 1, f. 13).

Cooperation between the universities in Cluj-Napoca and Geneva, during the period 1976-1979, reached an unprecedented level of intensity in spite of the unfavourable political context. It is an example which shows the limits of political influence on academic cooperation. For Romanian universities, the ability to maintain and develop contacts with foreign institutions was a symbolic survival of academic freedom.

Conclusion

In the first six decades of cooperation between the universities of Cluj and Geneva, two main periods are distinguishable: the interwar period and the post-war period, marked by the communist regime. The communist period lacks homogeneity and several distinct phases can be identified within this larger time frame, until 1979. The communist leadership made constant efforts to control education and research, as they did with all aspects of social life. A radical reform of the education was implemented in Romania in 1948. Universities lost their traditional autonomy and a system of censorship and control was implemented in all education and research institutions. However, communist authorities were unable, and sometimes unwilling, to interrupt all contacts with the scientific communities from the “capitalist countries”. Under strict supervision by central and local political authorities, “Babeş-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca was allowed to maintain and to expand its network of cooperation with foreign institutions around the world, regardless of their political orientation. This evolution was particularly strong during the so called “liberalization phase” (1965-1971). The attempt of communist authorities to implement the “cultural revolution” of 1971 was met with resistance by the academic community. Although the political context was becoming increasingly unfavourable, “Babeş-Bolyai” University insisted on keeping and developing its international contacts, including the one with the University of Geneva. The determination of the Swiss partners to honour the provisions established by the convention signed in 1971 was also crucial in maintaining this contact. This particular case of cooperation between universities shows that there was an undeniable influence of domestic and international politics on academic cooperation, but there was also a tendency of higher education institutions to overcome the limitations imposed by these external factors.

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