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# ***A Brief Rationale for a New Journal in the Field of Higher Education***

**Dan Chiribucă**

*Centre for University Development and Quality Management,  
Faculty of Sociology and Social Work,  
Babeş-Bolyai University, 1. M. Kogălniceanu St. Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
dchiribuca@socasis.ubbcluj.ro*

Undoubtedly, higher education has become a sector with a major role in the economic and social development, much more important than the position reflected by the rank in a hierarchy calculated on the basis of statistical indicators such as GDP, number of employees or number of enrolled students.

The societal importance of the higher education system is given not by the volume of financial flows, but by the fact that universities are public good institutions, essential as education agencies, knowledge producers and major cultural resources (Rumbley et al 2014).

Beyond generic value statements, from a real world, mundane-grounded point of view, higher education has become a worldwide enterprise, a very complex one in terms of organization, with multiple and quite often self-contradictory objectives/goals, highly autonomous and at the same time dependent upon public control and regulation, with various stakes and heterogeneous stakeholders.

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A natural result of these developments is the steady increase of the need for data, analyzes, theoretical and empirical research. Illustrative for this demand, and also for the way in which the higher education academic field assumes and nourishes its own growth and development is the steep raise of higher education journals in the last years. Inventories carried out by Boston College Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) recorded 280 journals in 2014 with 89 more than in 2006. It deserved to be noticed that the 2014 listing excluded more than 200 Chinese journals considered as being too local and with little impact beyond the sponsoring university (Rumbley et al 2014).

In such a fast growing market with so many new competitive actors, is it worthy to invest resources, even if that means mostly time and energy, for a new journal in the field of higher education? I firmly believe that the answer is yes.

Arguments behind this conviction are numerous and anchored in multiple plans. Some are related to the publishing realities, some to the substantial features and dynamics of the higher education system. As concerns the publishing, it is true that worldwide there are already so many valuable and influential journals that the opportunity and desirability to launch a new one should remain questionable. But sheer number is not synonym with equally distributed. Almost half of the journals listed by CIHE are published in four countries (USA, UK, Japan, China) and from 61 journals published in European countries, only 4 are in Central and Eastern Europe.

An uneven distribution of journals by countries does not mean anything in what concerns the potential bias in content coverage. Globalization and technology blurred the spatial boundaries and sealed the emancipation of knowledge flows. But the fact is that, despite an undeniable process of convergence, higher education systems remain a very heterogeneous and complex reality, a mix of universal invariants and very specific and local issues, of influences and dependencies exerted equally by global trends and local regulations. The diversity and range of relevant topics, approaches, research data and analyses are too vast and still too country-dependent to be comprehensively covered by journals published abroad, in remote countries. The white spots on the map of journals' regional belonging are doubled by a propensity related to content. A meta-analysis carried out recently on quality management

research in higher education institutions pointed out a predominance of theoretical articles in educational journals (Tari & Dick 2016).

There is no need to highlight the importance of conceptual and theoretical debates for the academic establishment and status of such a practical field as higher institution studies certainly is. But also, for policy and decision makers, as well as for all stakeholders who form the constituency of believers in the New Public Management narratives, analyses grounded in empirical research and tools for measuring the performance of universities are more valuable and necessary now than any time before. Consequently, the emergence of new journals in the field of higher education is rather an answer to institutionalized expectations than an academic fad.

As regards the dynamics of the higher education system, there are many drivers that constitute, on the one hand, challenges and constraints for contemporary higher education and, on the other hand, structural antecedents responsible for an entire set of systemic change and remodeling processes.

Some of these drivers are related to transformations and dynamics caused and assumed as elements of convergence generated by policies whose finality and stake transcend the education system. A relevant example is the Bologna process, which has initiated a convergence route for the European higher education system, with the manifest objective of ensuring comparable standards and quality of higher education qualifications.

Another part involves broader, cultural, economic, societal, structural transformations that have sources outside universities, but directly influence universities. There are changes extremely diverse in content and range that cover very different levels of the social environment (Locke & al 2011): demographic changes, technological innovations and developments, globalization and market orientation of educational processes and activities, redefining social welfare priorities. From the same category, but distinct through the major impact on the roles assumed by the university, are the fundamental changes in advanced economies that go from mass production and linear transfer relationships to more open, more interactive, knowledge driven, innovation-based systems. It is not the first time in history when universities find themselves in the flow of such transformations. Modernity and the industrial revolution have remodelled the university,

transforming it from a knowledge storehouse into a knowledge producer.

Nowadays, universities are again obliged to reorganize research, – new technological developments require interdisciplinary approaches, – to adapt their educational mission and methods, to reconsider how they develop and participate in knowledge transfers, including interactions and networks with industries and the community (Youtie, Shapira 2008). In the knowledge society, beyond the main roles of carrying out a more or less conventional research, and of a quality provider of educational services, the university is a hub and promoter of innovative knowledge.

The possible routes to be followed are neither clear nor predefined because in such a fluid social reality the destination points are constantly moving. The fact is that the classic Humboldtian model competes with entrepreneurial models which, besides an understandable focus on financial return of the university enterprise, involve active engagement in economic and social development by capitalizing on research, know-how transfer, spinoffs, cooperation with economic development agencies, a whole new direction recently coined as third stream activities. It is a competition further fuelled by the fact that innovations are now emerging from problem-oriented research that transcends the boundaries of traditional disciplines; energy, the environment, health, the aging society, poverty, are just a few possible examples. Transdisciplinarity has become an almost mandatory feature, which inherently questions the traditional segmentation of the university in clearly circumscribed and scientific fields assimilable to faculties.

Last but not least, another set of drivers derives from the fact that universities have been placed in a relatively new ideologically and narrative context. It is a frame established and built around a new set of values at its core: competition, performance, public accountability, environmental sustainability, and so on.

All these factors are influential and challenging but my belief is that the biggest case for the higher education system is none of them or others, but the relationship between university and change. One of the main dimensions of the traditional culture of the university, especially of a public university, is the autonomy against external influences. It has always been a protective quality for the independence of research and

freedom of thought, but also a deterrent of change. The culture of public universities is characterized by a strong resistance to change (Casablanca-Segura & Llonch 2016).

From the very beginning of the university as a public institution, the control of academics over their institution was a main tenet of the university organization and reluctance to lose this control remains till today a main driver of its internal policy. It is a conservatism cultivated by an almost universal rule of fixed-term, rotating, internal appointments to management positions. Consensus decision making by a board of academics is somehow fundamentally incompatible with strategic management involving long-term planning and objectives (Deem 2006). I have no doubts that no journal, old or new, or any number of research grounded articles would change that anytime soon. But I am also convinced that more professional information, more analyses of contemporary trends, more empirical researches and analyses of existing data, new public spaces used for problems identification and for debating solutions to these problems, looking for effective ways to use local resources in order to successfully participate in global competitions, as well as so many other possible examples, could not impend but only contribute to the progress of higher education as a system, practice and academic science. And I firmly believe that all of these are enough reasons to initiate and support the project of a new journal in this field.

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# ***Are University Mergers a Solution for the Problems of Romanian Higher Education Nowadays?***

**Adrian Hatos**

*University of Oradea, Faculty of Social-Humanistic Sciences, 1 Universităţii St.,  
410087, Oradea, Romania,  
Center for Higher Education Research and Development, Debrecen University  
ahatos@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** This article discusses the timeliness of university mergers against the background of the crisis in Romanian higher education. It includes a summary review of international experiences while underlining the evaluation of the net results of the mergers and it shows that, in drafting and implementing such initiatives, a lot of precaution is needed, given that worldwide results are rather ambiguous. Finally, it discusses a number of evolution scenarios for the mergers in Romania and offers policy recommendations in the field.

**Keywords:** University merger, higher education reform, impact evaluation

## ***Introduction***

In the last decade, calls for reform of higher education in Romania also included suggestions for mergers of universities. Such experiences are rather rare in Romania (we have the case of the takeover of North University in Baia Mare by the Technical University of Cluj or the failed attempt to merge, also through a takeover, of the Eftimie Murgu University from Reşiţa by the West University from Timişoara) and

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occurred against the background of financial difficulties of small-sized universities.

Even if in the discourse of educational policy the topic of university mergers is still a dormant one, it will surely come back on the agenda when a combination of crisis and reforming impetus will generate a renewed search for solutions.

Experiences of mergers and of consequently reducing the number of universities were identified, in the last two decades, in the literature (Aarrevaara & Dobson 2016; Aula & Tienari 2011; Clark 2005; Evans 2015; Geschwind, Melin, & Wedlin 2016; Hansen 2010; Harkin & Hazelkorn 2014; Harkin & Hazelkorn 2015; Harman & Meek 2002; Huang 2000; Lang 2003; Nokkala & Välimaa 2017; Salmi 2009) in China, France, England, the US, Denmark, Finland, Sweden or Ireland.

The cases or analyses identified in literature show that the merger is strongly supported by the states carrying out higher education reform programmes (the case of Ireland, Denmark, China or France). In such cases, the universities merge more or less voluntarily, often strongly motivated by the stimuli promised by the government (Huang 2000; Salmi 2009). However, the merger can also be the result of local initiatives, which aim at obtaining benefits, such as economies of scale, such as the case of the more or less friendly mergers in Sweden (Karlsson & Geschwind 2016), which show that, just as in the case of corporations, mergers can be friendly (advanced collaborations) or hostile (takeovers). Moreover, when it is to be found within a reform wave, the merger is often just a detail alongside changes regarding university management, academic governance, study programmes funding or concentrating resources in excellence centres or in consortia (Salmi 2009). This short articles attempts to analyse the opportunity of a number of initiatives of mergers in Romanian higher education starting from a brief review of the international experience in the field and from the current state of tertiary education in Romania.

### ***Arguments in favour of mergers***

Two phenomena explain, on one hand, and justify, on the other, the need identified at the level of management of higher education systems for concentrating the supply of higher education diplomas:

The massification of higher education, a phenomenon with numerous perverse consequences, generated endogenously by the quantitative and qualitative excesses of the supply (the best comparison model is the one of the real estate bubble, and the consequence could be a loss of credibility on long term for higher education diplomas). Inflation of university supply has lead, as it is well known, to suboptimal social effects: loss of diploma value and decrease in the quality of instruction on one hand, and unjustified and unbearable costs of public higher education systems, on the other.

The globalisation of the educational services market at tertiary level and of research, a phenomenon which is partly connected with the one above. All international rankings of universities only prove that a university is “better” the more “international” it is, namely it takes part at a global level in the competition for people, funding and recognition. Such an invasion creates further pressure on the marginal areas of the market, whose access to world-class research resources is almost impossible.

From here follow the main aims of some university merging programmes: Decreasing costs for supplying higher education programmes by reducing the number of administrative positions, sharing some facilities, eliminating double or parallel programmes by uniting common study programmes, etc.

Fighting against the educational oversupply and, consequently, against all its unfavourable consequences on higher education and on the value of the diplomas;

Improving their position in some international rankings, where they take advantage of the fact that these do not weigh their scientific performance indicators against the number of students or members of the academic body.

### ***Merger impact: the international experience***

The literature does not include many details on the results of these organisational operations, in relation to their objectives. It rather holds back regarding the evaluation of the impact of various merger operations, most analyses concentrating on the process rather than on the results (Aarrevaara & Dobson 2016; Karlsson & Geschwind 2016;

Nokkala & Välimaa 2017; Pruvot, Estermann & Mason 2015). Naturally, the Chinese programme of halving the number of their universities is a success – only its success is discussed in an article by an author from the Popular Republic (Huang 2000)!

Yet there is already a certain convergence of the conclusions regarding the net results of mergers, experiences of such type being numerous enough and with enough spread through time in order to allow for such evaluations.

The merger seen as having limited aim and being insufficiently prepared may encounter many, and sometimes unexpected, difficulties. According to Salmi, the French grouped universities from the same territory around a Grand Ecole, which lead to the desired increase in the score in the Shanghai ranking, but did not manage to solve other problems deriving from the poor management of their higher education system (Salmi 2009: 44).

The article referenced lays the blame with the lack of assimilation of reciprocal organisational cultures, as well as the financial and social difficulties that the merger brings along. Also from France, we have a positive example of joint institutional production of several Grand Ecoles, of Paris I University and of CNRS who created, jointly, an economic sciences school – Paris School of Economics, after the model of the famous LSE. But here it is rather a consortium than a fusion, and the case could be analysed in depth by all those who seek such undertakings. Salmi also offers the 2008 example of two universities from Manchester that merged forming the new University of Manchester, in order to reduce costs. However, their deficits were not reduced following the merger, because making the educational offer and the staff more efficient could not be achieved completely, while the expenses were further increased by the investment made with the view of transforming the new institution in a pole of excellence in research (see, for this example, also Clark 2005). The World Bank's rapporteur has positive prognosis for the efforts carried out in Denmark, where the mergers were accompanied by management and academic governance measures considered adequate. However, Hansen (2010) does not share fully the optimism of the World Bank's specialist.

One of the almost general conclusion of the studies on the impact of university mergers is that they lead to the consolidation and development of the academic offer of the new entity, the students being

offered more numerous and diverse study programmes, as well as richer support and student services (Gamage 1992; Harman & Harman 2003; Wan & Peterson 2007). The same studies show that the new higher education institutions enjoy better recognition, a higher visibility and a better positioning on the market, all these being facilitated by efficient branding strategies, when applied (Geschwind et al. 2016; Harkin & Hazelkorn 2015).

On the other hand, many of the promises accompanying the merger efforts are not materialised when evaluating results. Studies generally agree that the expected economies of scale are not achieved. On the contrary, the merger usually comes with an increase in costs (Gamage 1992; Harman & Harman 2003; Wan & Peterson 2007). And no organisational, cultural or educational synergies appear: the Australian mergers have not led to an improvement of teaching in the departments that were initially rated more poorly (Gamage 1992), the coloured students integrated in the historically white South African universities have not felt an improvement of their status (De Beer, Smith & Jansen 2009) and generally the merger process is accompanied by a high level of stress for the staff of the universities involved (Evans 2015; Karlsson & Geschwind 2016).

Another reason for mergers – improving the position in the international rankings that do not take into account the size of the institutions (such as ARWU – Shanghai) is met only under certain conditions. Simulations for the case of the French universities show that, according to the chosen combination of institutions, the results can be spectacular or disappointing (Docampo, Egret & Cram 2015).

### ***The situation in Romania and the feasibility of possible mergers***

All of the above are highly relevant stakes for Romanian higher education nowadays, especially for the public institutions. In what these are concerned, as noticed by all realistic analyses, there is a chronic efficiency problem, which requires the questioning of the legitimacy of investment in Romanian state-owned universities. The indicators of the retardation of Romanian universities have been repeated obsessively, a situation made worse in the last two years by the entrance on the educational market of the first generations born after 1990, which lead

to institutional diversification, massification and decrease of selectivity (Andreescu et al. 2012; Deca 2015; Hatos & Pop 2015).

The bleak conditions of Romanian higher education stated above point rather clearly to the issue, namely the uncontrollable competition from the atomised population of universities, but also show the limited character of mergers as a solution. Mergers or consortia may regularize the behaviour of institutional actors through agreements between them, may bring economies of scale, even though the international experience is not encouraging, but cannot prevent the drifting of those that do not take part in such constructions; consequently, the efficient action of some market regulation structures (such as ARACIS, but without its obvious conflicts of interests) remains fundamental.

The merger, and its soft version, the consortia, are collective actions in the most economic meaning of the term. The economic and quality advantage of university union – the public good produced by these cooperatives – derives partly from the fact that these may impose a local control of a monopolist type on supplying of higher education (for many potential students, the changing of their residence town is not an easy option so that they are captive clients of universities from their proximity). It is a benefit of what Harkin and Hazelkorn (2015) call the new regionalism.

A consortium or a union of universities, which is not subjected to great competition pressure, may increase fees as well as raise requirements when selecting or evaluating students, both during their studies and when awarding degrees, without the fear of losing students. Naturally, such collective action does not have real chances of success if, outside of it, there are many institutions who disregard the rules, the Gordian knot of such an endeavour being, at the end of the day, the bringing together of all institutions of higher education from a certain area of recruitment into a single coalition. In Oradea, for instance, which is a university centre situated at a respectable distance from the others in the region (Arad, Timișoara, Cluj, Baia Mare) a common policy regarding the fees and quality could yield quick benefits for the four local institutions (University of Oradea, Emanuel Institute, Agora University and Partium University) by avoiding fee and selectivity auctioning.

However, nothing guarantees, for instance, that controlling the number of study programmes resulting from the amalgamation –

another presumptive advantage – will not be compensated on the market by endless entrepreneurial initiatives which will cover the temporary deficit in the educational offer resulting from the merger. The objective of fighting against the educational oversupply is not sustainable unless the mechanisms for authorising study programmes become more restrictive than they had been before the exacerbation of the massification of higher education. Replacing two competing programmes in juridical sciences with a single one supplied in two locations but with the joint use of some resources will not be useful if, for instance, those academics who would be potentially unhappy with being made redundant following the efficiency measures accompanying the merger would start a new university endeavour with a parallel offer, probably at an unmatched price. It is clear that the oversupply of higher education diplomas and the dumping – practiced most often by some private institutions that do not aim to be recognised or to have public support – will only be stopped through external, unequivocal interventions.

### ***Necessary precautions***

The merger can be promising and luring for some university leaders because it is a typical example of a shock strategy. Underperforming study programmes or higher education institutions may be dissolved during such evolutions and the merger can be the moment for radical change in the institutional structure of higher education. Obviously, such situations are also opportunities for abuse and unwanted developments. Consequently, all stages of institutional reform require maximum transparency in setting objectives, of the solutions and in implementing them, an endeavour that does not resonate fully with the idea of radical reform. The permanent exercise of negotiation and compromise required in order to not jeopardize the merger limits, however, as suggested by the analyses of the cases from France or Manchester, the results of the amalgamation to the extent of making the opportunity of this re-organisation debatable.

The premise that reuniting people and buildings under the same administrative umbrella will bring in itself an advantage when it comes to performance in research is also debatable, other than just summing

them together and “bypassing” the international rankings, which are not relativized enough to take into account the number of researchers or students. Such tricks cannot possibly have sustainable effects when it comes to scientific productivity. Two mediocre researchers do not one better researcher make, and “concentrating resources” is just a good fetish to invoke in meetings. University coalitions must create added value of the type of joint investment in laboratories, publishing houses or libraries, of complementary project teams, in building excellence study and research programmes (such as Paris School of Economics) or through joining the international networks of researchers and by vigorously supporting the participation to funding competitions. Carrying out major organisational reform efforts, of the extent of amalgamations, only to obtain a better position (by a number of places) in international rankings with debatable validity is also a debatable option.

Increasing the selectivity of study programmes and of the universities is, without a doubt, a wish to which mergers and control over accreditation can contribute in a positive manner. Such a result, however, has to also be judged from the point of view of social justice, because the mere increase of the difficulty of access to higher education and to diplomas will impact mainly the candidates coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Access to higher education is already a business from which entire categories of young people are excluded and, moreover, the indicators of quality and prestige of universities or of the study programmes are correlated too much with the level of instruction and the wallets of the students’ parents. Thus, it becomes mandatory that mergers and consortia are judged as well from the perspective of the effects on the distribution of access opportunities to higher education, equal opportunities local or national policies being mandatory. If these are missing, the quality advantage will be eroded by the negative social effects of the polarised access to higher education positions.

However, from this perspective, mergers can even become a solution to decreasing inequity of access to quality education deriving from the co-existence of higher education institutions that are informally or formally stratified – by reputation or even by official rankings – and which have a vicious-circle type of effect, by reproducing the status inequalities. Amalgamation of universities from the “inferior”

category within a comprehensive institution alongside nuclei of excellence in teaching and research may produce a benefit for the students from disadvantaged categories who should enjoy an improved reputation of universities, but also access to better quality resources of the enlarged structure. Here an important role could be held by the initiatives of diversification of study offers (recognition of prior learning and non-traditional study forms) that meet the needs of the non-traditional students. As the case from South Africa shows, initiatives of this type must be carefully planned and guided in order to avoid producing mere structures of reproducing inequality.

### ***Instead of conclusions***

University mergers, as well as amalgamations – another specimen from the kingdom of the coalition meant to manage the “educational bubble” – may be timely for the sustainable generation of a number of benefits from the point of view of economic efficiency, scientific productivity and educational quality, but especially from the point of view of availability of a number of quality academic programmes and services for an extended number of students – if they are accompanied by a number of institutional components:

Supporting an efficient mechanism of regulating the educational services supply in the tertiary sector (mandatory international accreditation of universities would be one possible solution).

Preferential support of those university coalitions that prove that they can attain significant savings, other than the reduction of administrative costs and that they are committed to investing in joint research and teaching structures of excellence.

Support for the coalitions that propose comprehensive policies for equal opportunities and support for disadvantaged categories. Truly synergic initiatives must be supported, which lead to the joint use of quality resources and which diversify creatively the educational offer, in order to deliver quality educational services in an efficient manner to as many students as possible, both of the traditional as well as non-traditional type.

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***Improving Performance of Universities Using University  
Rankings.  
Case Study, Al Farabi Kazakh National University,  
Kazakhstan***

**Paul Şerban Agachi**

*Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST),  
Botswana,  
Babeş-Bolyai University (BBU), Cluj-Napoca, Romania,  
Member of the International Ranking Expert Group Executive Committee  
agachip@biust.ac.bw*

**Abstract:** Starting from personal experience and expertise, this article discusses the relevance of international rankings for improving the individual performance of universities. After analyzing the most relevant indicators used by one such ranking, the article suggests possible solutions to be considered by one individual university (i.e. Al Farabi Kazakh National University) if it aims to improve its position in international league tables and the quality of the processes in the university. At the same time, the article debates the degree to which the indicators used by the afore-mentioned international ranking are still relevant and can still be useful at institutional level, for university leaders.

**Keywords:** rankings, league tables, higher education performance indicator, higher education reform, Al Farabi Kazakh National University

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## ***Preamble***

In 2000, as a member of the Quality Management Council in Romania, we presented in The Rector's Conference, together with Professor Nica Panaite from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, our conclusions about the needed metrics to assess the performance of the universities (Nica 2000: 68-237). In 2005, at the initiative of CEPES (UNESCO Centre Europeen pour Enseignement Superieur) in Bucharest, we initiated with the personal involvement of Prof. Jan Sadlak, the first initiative of a Romanian ranking of universities (Agachi & Moraru 2005). In 2006, at the initiative of the Romanian Research Council for University Research (CNCSIS), we produced the first ranking of the Romanian universities (Agachi, Moraru, Mihaila & Nica 2007; Agachi, Moraru, Cramarencu, Curaj 2009).

In the Dean's Conference in Barcelona, held at the initiative of European Strategic Management for Universities (ESMU), I explained "How you can convince a university to try to become research intensive" (Agachi 2008) and in 2009, I was invited by UNICA Conference in Dubrovnik, to present the point of view of International Ranking Expert Group (IREG) regarding university rankings (Agachi 2009).

This presentation was made based on the experience I had in Babeş-Bolyai University with the program BBU 500 (Agachi & Bucur 2009). In 2011, in Brussels I explained to the academic community representatives how can we make the university rankings useful (Agachi 2011). In 2012, at the AUF Conference in Bucharest, "La fin des classements? De la compétition à la coopération universitaire" (what a doomsday they announced!) I represented - IREG - and tried to explain to the francophone world of universities that rankings, in spite of their limits and simplicity, are useful. In 2013, at WCU - 5<sup>th</sup> Conference in Shanghai, as counselor of the Rector of the University of Bucharest, we presented a paper about how we can improve the situation in the University of Bucharest (Agachi, Nica & Moraru 2012; Dumitru et al 2013).

The same year, the University of Debrecen, Hungary, invited me to present how their performance is seen and how it can improve. In 2015, I was asked by Al Farabi University in Almaty to help them understand

their position in rankings and help them improve. In 2016, being at BIUST, I made a study on the positioning of the African universities in rankings, where the university from Botswana were placed and how they could improve their performances. And all this, in spite of the predictions that the “evil ranking movement” damages the quality of the universities (Rauhvargers 2011).

It is very important to understand what is behind the methodology of a ranking. The rankings measure some output indicators which they consider to be relevant for a certain goal; for example, from the beginning, the ARWU ranking (also known as the Shanghai ranking) was asked by the Chinese government to elaborate a methodology to assess which was the position of the Chinese universities in the world of higher education. Why? Because the Chinese government targeted the first economic position in the world to be reached in some 20 years and they were convinced that the nation can be built only through a higher education of the highest quality. And this is the reason why most indicators belong to the science and technology fields. Because the economic improvement was targeted!

I am writing this story, because I have noticed that, along the years, for a very long period, in spite of all the attacks on rankings, the question “how can universities improve based on university rankings” is still asked. The present paper presents a point of view on how the university management can fix some benchmarks for assessing the performance of the university’s activities. No matter what one ranking might measure, one university cannot be “bad” in one ranking and “good” in another one. Because the good or bad performance is obtained in a good or bad environment in which values of ethics, transparency, engagement, institutional identification, recognition of merits are, or are not, cultivated.

In 2015, at the initiative of Al Farabi University in Almaty, Kazakhstan, I tried to carry out a study of how to use one ranking (the ranking in which they were well positioned) to improve the quality of the university’s activities: teaching and learning, research, innovation, community engagement, internationalization. Al Farabi University is the oldest in Kazakhstan, being 75 years old, and it is a force in the higher education landscape in Central Asia (according to their own website). It has 2,500 academic staff, 18,000 students and aims to become one of the Top-200 research universities in the world.

The QS WUR was the ranking in which the university was well positioned (ranked 305 in the world and 14 in Central Eastern Europe-Central Asia). See *Table 1*.

The QS ranking is somehow commercial: many universities which are not present in the very exclusivist rankings such as THES or ARWU, have the ambition to be placed somewhere on the list. And their ambition has to be satisfied. And QS placed them on a list, inventing some indicators which allowed them to be present there. I do not state that those indicators are not at all relevant, but I admit that some of them can be either manipulated or improved through a well targeted policy which is not always related to the quality of the university activity.

The indicators of the QS ranking in 2014 are presented in *Table 2*.

*QS ranking for universities in Kazakhstan and other neighboring countries 2014*

Name of the university	Country	Total score	Rank EE-CA	World R*	Academic Reput/R	Employer Reput/R	Faculty/ Student/R	Staff w. PhD/R	Papers/ Faculty/R	Citations/ Paper/R	Intl Faculty/R	Intl Stud/R	Web Impact/R
Al Farabi Almaty	KZ	75.6	14	305	99.8/3	96.2/13	77.3/32	71.6/41	5/101	14.8/101	85.2/13	26.9/64	24.2/77
Lev Gumiliov Almaty	KZ	71.6	23	324	95.1/10	72.5/31	99.6/7	9.6/101	3.1/101	40/96	88.4/10	16.4/90	37.5/41
KNTechU Almaty	KZ	50	51-60	601-650	-	-	95.5/13	18.1/101	2.4/101	3.3/101	18.4/67	14.2/95	17.9/97
KBTU Almaty	KZ	48.8	51-60	651-7010	-	-	28.4/101	68.3/49	14.7/101	10/101	100/1	2.9/101	7.5/101+
M.Auezov SKSU	KZ	38.4	71-80	651-700	-	-	61.3/54	38.8/101	1.6/101	3.9/101	69.6/20	22.8/73	6.7/101+
Ablai Khan Almaty	KZ	35.1	81-90	701	-	-	45.1/86	29.4/101	0	0	48.7/27	11.2/101	1.9/101+
Baku SU	AZ	36.3	71-80	701	-	-	39.6/101	13.3/101	19.8/101	11.6/84	16.8/87	1.4/101+	
ULomonosov	RU	100	1	114	100/1	100/1	99.8/5	85.8/15	81.7/29	58.2/59	43.8/33	90.7/12	100/2
Tomsk SU	RU	67.5	33	491-500	87.2/27	63.7/41	63/52	89.6/13	40.2/66	17.7/101	87.8/12	66.7/29	29.7/59
UWarsaw	PL	87,9	4	335	99.6/5	99/4	39.9/101	91/11	65.6/46	91.9/24	61.8/25	40.7/52	88.8/14
UKarolinska Prague	CZ	93,8	2	244	99.9/2	96.3/12	40.9/96	88.1/15	95/11	97.7/11	64.9/23	85.8/16	100/3
METU Ankara	TR	82,1	9	401-410	98.4/6	98.5/5	19.1/101	68.9/47	99/5	88.9/28	33.2/42	39.8/54	51.9/25
Eotvos Lorand Budapest	HU	75,3	15	601-650	87.4/20	65.4/38	27.3/101	74.4/32	83.4/27	94.1/17	14.8/72	27.9/63	92.9/11
UBucharest	RO	68,4	30	651-700	83.2/24	95.8/15	22/101	79/27	68.9/45	48.4/75	19.2/75	12.8/101	25.7/70
U Sofia	BG	52,8	49	651-700	59.5/52	39/63	53.6/67	52.7/79	44.6/62	88.6/29	0	40.8/51	32.6/49

*Table 1. Comparative positions of Kazakh universities and some of the region*

\* R - rank

## QS Methodology

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Weighting</i>	<i>Source</i>
Academic reputation	30.00%	Global survey of academics
Employer reputation	20.00%	Global survey of employers
Faculty/student ratio	15.00%	Institutions/public data
Web impact	10.00%	Webometrics
Papers per faculty member	10.00%	Bibliometric data from Scopus
Staff with PhD (%)	5.00%	Institutions/public data
Citations per paper	5.00%	Bibliometric data from Scopus
International faculty (%)	2.50%	Institutions/public data
International students (%)	2.50%	Institutions/public data

*Table 2. QS methodology*

The following description is taken from the Methodology of QS ranking as it was presented on their website, in 2012<sup>1</sup>. Since 2013, the methodology changed, but the present paper made use of the previous one.

### 1. Academic reputation

QS's global survey of academics has been the centerpiece of the QS World University Rankings since they were first published in 2004. In 2014, results were based on responses from 62,000 academics worldwide.

Having provided their name, contact details, job title and the institution where they are based, respondents identify the countries, regions and faculty areas that they have most familiarity with, and up to two narrower subject disciplines in which they consider themselves expert. For each of the (up to five) faculty areas they identify, respondents are asked to list up to 10 domestic and 30 international

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iu.qs.com/product/2012-qs-world-university-rankings-supplement-2/>.

institutions that they consider excellent for research in the given area. They are not able to select their own institution.

## 2. Employer reputation

The QS World University Rankings are unique in incorporating employability as a key factor in the evaluation of international universities, and in 2014 it used over 27,000 survey responses to compile the results for the overall rankings. The **employer reputation survey** works on a similar basis to the academic one, only without the channeling for different faculty areas.

Employers are asked to identify up to 10 domestic and 30 international higher education institutions they consider excellent for the recruitment of graduates. They are also asked to identify from which disciplines they prefer to recruit. After examining where these two questions intersect, a measure of excellence in a given discipline can be inferred.

### *Analysis of the ranking and proposals for improving the quality of the university Al Farabi and, implicitly, the position in ranking*

The performances which should be taken as targets for improving the quality of the university were highlighted with grey color in *Table 1*. Not only from Kazakhstan, but also from regions with similar history of development of the higher education sector and with better performances.

1. Academic reputation (30%) and employer reputation (20%) forms 50% of the score. First 10 universities in the ranking have over 90 points at this chapter. It is remarkable how carefully they treated the global surveys!
2. An important contribution (15%) has the teacher/student ratio, this supposing to indicate the "quality" of education. Most of the universities in the former Soviet space, where there is a constraint in this sense, have good ratios. In Kazakhstan, as I was informed by a senior member of the Kazakh Academy of

Sciences, the universities are obliged not to exceed 12 students/1 staff.

3. The following indicators of impact are: Web impact (10%) and Papers/faculty member (10%); these first 5 indicators contributing with 85% of the overall score.

Focusing the analysis on these indicators one can state:

1. Academic reputation should be given by a group of elements, such as: international and joint international publications, quality of international professors and researchers, quality of international in- and outgoing students, real international relations, lobby, etc. But the reputation is biased by the fact that the respondents are mostly accepted from the region in which they live. And this is subjected to the perception of the region regarding quality. In one region, it may be that the strict compliance with the rules and regulations is the most important factor (repeated examinations, checking the homework, etc.); in another one, the scientific production might be the most important, in a third region of the world, the position of the graduates in different companies is the most important. So, this indicator is too subjective to be given such a weight. In an analysis of the Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung (CHE) in Germany, it was demonstrated that the reputation does not go necessarily along with the scientific contribution of the university (Berghoff & Federkeil 2006).
2. Reputation among employers, of course, is given primarily by the quality of the graduates (what they know, and how they perform what they are asked to do, etc.) but it is also helped a lot by the university, through supplying the QS team with a comprehensive list of reputed employers; and this is possible through a good networking via the Alumni Association. Because Kazakhstan is a country rich in resources, many international companies are opening branches in the country and many graduates are employed there.

Concerning these two indicators, I cannot help quoting our colleagues from CHE (Berghoff & Federkeil 2006), who, after studying the correlation between reputation and research & innovation force of the university state the following: „Reputation can be a useful

information in rankings as it reflects existing reputation hierarchies that are a social fact and it is an information students want to know, but only when the validity and reliability is guaranteed but due to its characteristics and limitations it should not be used as an element of a weighted overall score. As normally differences in values are so small – in particular in the lower range – it should not be transformed into league table positions”.

In what these two indicators are concerned, Al Farabi is placed remarkably well.

1. Analyzing the third indicator in the order of weight: student/teacher ratio is advantaging the universities with small working groups, mainly the technical and scientific universities. It is rational for a science and technology program to have a ratio of around 10-15 students/teacher, for arts 1-3, for medicine 3-10, for social sciences and humanities, 20. Very often, the finances of the university do not allow to follow these ratios. Al Farabi should improve in what this indicator is concerned if the finances allow it.
2. The scientific productivity expressed through SCOPUS registered papers/faculty member is a sign of quality of the staff, as well the citations/paper; an academic who does not produce research is not really a good teacher, because it conveys knowledge only from other's experience and not their own. The score for this indicator, at some top universities like University Charles from Prague is 0.95, for University of Budapest 0.83, for the University of Bucharest 0.57. Through a simple interpolation, judging the score of University Al Farabi, the productivity is 0.04! Regarding the other qualitative indicator (citations/paper), the QS weight is so small (5%) that it does not encourage actually the increase of quality.
3. The figures for international students and international professors are quite good, but I suggest here to try to attract international professors with scientific performance (international ISI/SCOPUS papers, books in internationally recognized editing houses), with the knowledge of growing scientists around them.

### ***How can Al Farabi University improve its activity based on rankings?***

Theoretically, we should dig into the score calculation methodology, but most of the methodologies, do not respect the Berlin Principles of University Rankings. They only describe in general lines how they calculate the scores. The same happens with the QS ranking. We may make an assumption: with the exception of ARWU, a ranking which uses a logarithmic scale in calculations of the scores, the other rankings use linear relationships (e.g. URAP). So a linear extrapolation should not be far from reality.

We can get simple information at a first glimpse. We choose one university not far from the one analyzed: Al Farabi (AF), compared with University of Bucharest (UB).

We know the data from 2014 from the University of Bucharest: academic staff – 1,335 (Romania SCOPUS); SCOPUS documents – 758; SCOPUS citations – 4,237 ([www.edu.ro](http://www.edu.ro)).

So, the parameters for UB are 0.57 paper/staff and 5.58 citations/paper.

For AF, the calculation, using a linear relationship, results in 0.04 papers/staff and 1.4 citations/paper. It means that AF has to improve 14 times as publication productivity and 4 times as citations/paper. For sure, this comes from the Soviet tradition that research institutes are doing research and universities only teach. But this is not the case right now. Consequently, the top management of the university has to take measures to motivate staff to publish much more (an internal analysis can show where the smallest productivity and production is) and to publish in journals with higher impact factor which attract more citations (an internal analysis can show which are the most suitable journals in which to publish in each field of the university). Another measure can be to affiliate one Institute of Research with full time researchers. A special policy of motivation and engagement of the staff has to be drawn, assuring a climate of transparency and meritocracy, creating an environment which stimulates innovation, creating good research conditions, not excluding additional remuneration. In this way, in 5-7 years, Al Farabi University can improve a lot in these areas.

## Conclusions

In the world there are about 30,000 higher education institutions and about 17,000 universities. The QS ranking assesses among 4,000 higher education institutions and ranks about 800. University Al Farabi has a good position in QS ranking which is the merit of the administration of the institution and of the staff and students. The presence in one global ranking on a visible good position is a good result and can be a good conveyor of image. It can contribute seriously to the reputation of the university. The university has to take this opportunity seriously. Rankings do show where the university is, in comparison to others, but do not show how they can reach certain higher positions in the league tables.

However, it should be careful with what real quality means: it means good professors, good students, good research, good teaching and research equipment, good research and administrative staff, a general climate of stimulation the development and innovation. (Figure 1).

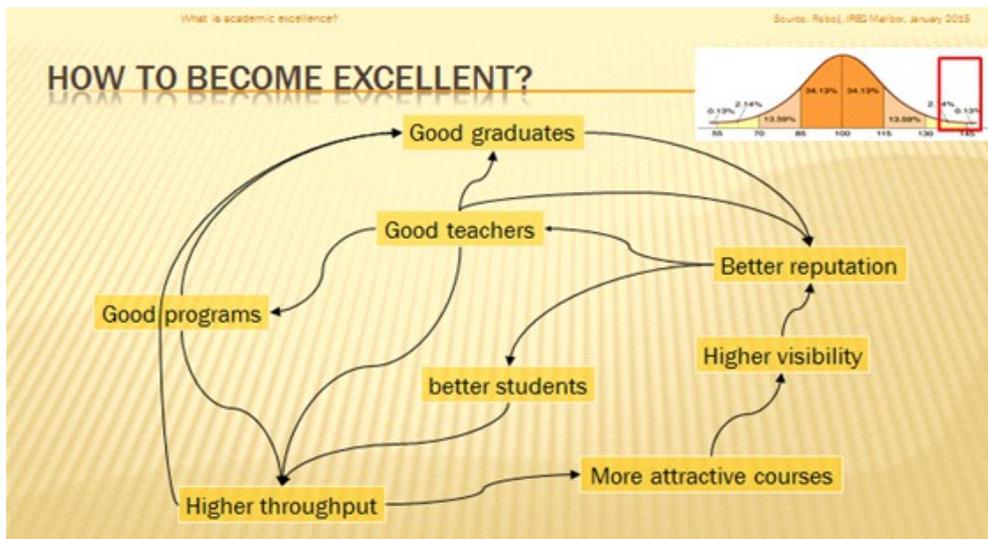


Figure 1. Quality of a university (Source: Rebolj 2015)

The contribution of a university to the development of a country is mainly measured through the quality of the graduates, the way they contribute to the development of the society and economy, the quality of research and innovation in the university.

I am very sure some of the graduates of Al Farabi are very good and perform well where their job is. The university has to increase the number of high quality graduates. But also to increase the quality of research and innovation. In URAP ranking, based only on research performances, Al Farabi is on 1967<sup>th</sup> position in the world and Lev Gumiliov on 1699<sup>th</sup> position. Among the 1352 institutions from Asia which are included in the Scimago ranking (exclusively based on research production), there is none from Kazakhstan! Al Farabi should be careful about this aspect and treat it with consideration.

In short, if one really understands rankings, one can use them for improvement.



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# ***International Participation in Quality Assurance within the European Higher Education Area***

**Adriana Daniela Șerban**

*Centre for University Development and Quality Management,  
Babeș-Bolyai University, 1. M. Kogălniceanu St. Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
adriana.serban@ubbcluj.ro*

**Abstract.** At the Berlin Ministerial Meeting in September 2003, ministers with responsibility for higher education tasked the Bologna Follow-up Group to undertake a stocktaking exercise on the progress made in three priority action lines – *quality assurance, the two-cycle degree system and recognition of degrees and periods of study*. The international participation and networking in quality assurance within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was established as one of the aspects that needs to be monitored. The group presented detailed reports at conferences held in Bergen (May 2005), London (May 2007), Leuven (April 2009), Bucharest (April 2012) and Yerevan (May 2015). The purpose of this paper is to present the comparative results of the five stocktaking exercises regarding the international participation within EHEA and to provide information about how the Romanian higher education system has faced this challenge.

**Keywords.** international participation, Bologna Scorecard; stocktaking exercise; Quality Assurance; EHEA.

## Introduction

At the Berlin meeting in September 2003, ministers with responsibility for higher education agreed that a stocktaking exercise should be conducted, to measure the progress made in implementing certain reforms within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), regarding the three main directions: *quality assurance, the two-cycle degree system* and *recognition of degrees and periods of study*. They requested the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to develop the stocktaking process and to prepare detailed reports for the next ministerial meetings.

In March 2004, a group of experts were chosen to follow the aforementioned aspects. The working group consulted with partners including the European University Association (EUA), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the EURYDICE Network (a structure of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency/EACEA, which offers information, analyses and statistics regarding European higher education) and presented detailed reports during conferences of the ministers responsible with higher education at Bergen (May 2005), London (May 2007), Leuven (April 2009), Bucharest (April 2012) and Yerevan (May 2015). Along with the material prepared by EURYDICE, the National Reports of the participant countries represented the main source of information for the stocktaking exercise.

For developing the Bologna Scorecard, the working group reviewed each of the three actions lines, and elaborated key criteria. Each criterion was further expanded on the basis of five benchmarks (levels of achievements), which would serve to measure the extent of progress:

1. Little progress has been made yet (level 1)
2. Some progress has been made (level 2)
3. Good performance (level 3)
4. Very good performance (level 4)
5. Excellent performance (level 5)

In the context of the Bologna process, between 2005 and 2015, European higher education was marked by several important events - European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) were adopted in 2005 and reviewed in 2015, the compiling of the European Quality Assurance

Register (EQAR) has started in 2008, the same year the European Qualification Framework (EQF) based on learning outcomes was adopted, followed by the development and the implementation of the National Qualification Framework in the EHEA member countries.

### ***Methodology***

In order to identify the context and the requirements for international cooperation in quality assurance in European higher education, a document analysis was developed. The investigation approach is Cartesian (Ghiglione & Matalon, 1987 in Ilut 1997), the investigation being carried out in a quantitative manner, associated with the identification of both the context and the message content.

Aiming to explore how Romania faced the challenge of international participation in quality assurance, an individual instrumental (Stake, in Denzin and Lincoln 1994), i.e. a descriptive case study (Yin 2005), was conducted. This country is a full member of EHEA since 1999, also being the first ex-communist nation state that, due to its progress in quality assurance, hosted a conference of the ministers responsible with higher education (Bucharest 2012).

In the pre-analytical stage, the floating reading of the five reports on the Bologna Scorecards results was performed for the construction of the document's body (Moscovici & Buschini 2007). This revealed the necessity of a longitudinal comparative approach and suggested the key-words for the analysis. The documents sample was set to the five reports submitted by the working group for the conferences of the ministers responsible with higher education (Bergen 2005, London 2007, Leuven 2009, Bucharest 2012 and Yerevan 2015) and the five Romanian National Reports. In order to complete the outlined sketch, but without insisting on a rigorous analysis, we also refer to other six important documents regarding the quality assurance process of the Romanian higher education system, namely:

1. Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 concerning the quality assurance of the educational services
2. Law no. 87/2006 for approving EO no.75/2005
3. "Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Reference Standards and List of Performance Indicators" of the Romanian

Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) (2006)

4. Guide for Quality Evaluation of University Study Programs and Higher Education Institutions, an 2006 ARACIS document which supports current changes when necessary
5. Law of National Education no. 1/2011
6. Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2011 (completing the EO no. 75/2005)

The documents' selection was conceived following the criterion of their significance for the proposed resolution (Ragin 2006) as well as their degree of similitude (Durkheim 1895/2002). The construct equivalent (Mills et al 2006) is assured by the fact that the documents are conceived by the same authorities and have the same purpose.

The key-words we have used (and topics linked on) were *international, external, outside the country, other country, border, open, participation/collaboration, and peers/experts/team*. The documents in their entirety were considered the analysis units, and the text message was determined as communication element.

Considering the triangulation principle and aiming for a deeper analysis of the case study, in addition to the comparative register, the website of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) was consulted, in order to identify the level of the international experts' participation in the evaluation process of the Romanian higher education institutions.

### ***The international participation scorecards***

On Quality Assurance (QA), the Berlin Communiqué (2003) stated that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved;
- An evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results;
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures;
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

Based on this statement, the working group established the following criteria:

1. Stage of development of quality assurance system;
2. Key elements of evaluation systems;
3. Level of participation of students;
4. Level of international participation, co-operation and networking.

The 2005 report's conclusion regarding the QA process was that the great majority of countries have made excellent or very good progress; however, a low level of students' and international participation was also underlined. The indicators for the international participation were targeted on the national bodies for quality assurance, their governance and membership (*Table 1*). The results showed that only 12 of the 40 participant countries (there are two separate scores for three of the countries: Belgium, Serbia and Montenegro, and for the United Kingdom) had international participation in the governance of national bodies for QA, namely Austria, Belgium (both Flemish and French Communities), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and United Kingdom (except Scotland). According to the national reports, the main barrier consisted in legal or statutory issues as well as language obstacles. More often the participants (16 countries) declared their involvement in teams for external review.

In 2007, five more countries were included – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The criterion for international participation in quality assurance became more challenging. For the *excellent performance* benchmark, another request was added, consisting of the external evaluation of quality assurance agencies. In the same time, including foreign experts in the governance of national bodies for quality assurance or as members of external review was still an issue. This is why only 11 of the 45 countries met the demands for level 5 (excellent performances) and 16, for level 3 (*good performances*), while there were 3 countries where *some progress has been made* (level 2) and 4 countries having no international involvement or no clarity regarding the structures and arrangements on this purpose. One of the report's conclusions is that extending the level of international participation is one of the main concerns and it needs significant effort to be carried out.

*Table 1. The indicators for the international participation criterion*

Level of international participation, co-operation and networking			No. of countries
2005	5	International participation at three levels: - in the governance of national bodies for QA - in teams for external review - membership of ENQA or other international networks	12
	4	International participation at two of the three levels	16
	3	International participation at one of the three levels	6
	2	Involvement in other forms of transnational co-operation in executing QA	9
	1	No international participation yet OR no clarity about structures and arrangements for international participation.	0
2007	5	International participation takes place at four levels: - in the governance of national bodies for quality assurance - in the external evaluation of national QA agencies - as members or observers within teams for external review of Higher education institutions and/or programmes - membership of ENQA or other international networks.	11
	4	International participation at three of the four above levels	14
	3	International participation at two of the four above levels	16
	2	International participation at one of the four above levels	3
	1	No international involvement OR no clarity about structures and arrangements for international participation	4
2009	5	In all cases, there is international participation at four levels: - in the governance of national bodies for quality assurance - in the external evaluation of national QA agencies - as members or observers within teams for external review of Higher education institutions and/or programmes - membership of ENQA or other international networks	16
	4	International participation takes place at above levels: 1); 2) AND either 3) or 4).	12
	3	International participation takes place at levels 1) and 2) listed above.	4

Level of international participation, co-operation and networking			No. of countries
	2	International participation takes place either at level 1) or 2) listed above.	14
	1	There is no international involvement or structures and arrangements for international participation are not yet clear.	2
2012	5	In all cases the following four aspects are met: - international peers/expert participate in governance of national QA bodies - international peers/experts participate as members/observers in evaluation teams - international peers/experts participate in follow-up procedures - agencies are full members of ENQA and/or listed on EQAR	8
	4	Three of the four aspects are met	11
	3	Two of the four aspects are met	10
	2	One of the four aspects are met	11
	1	No international participation	7
	2015	5	In all cases the following four aspects are met: - international peers/expert participate in governance of national QA bodies - international peers/experts participate as members/observers in evaluation teams - international peers/experts participate in follow-up procedures - agencies are full members of ENQA and/or listed on EQAR
4		Three of the four aspects are met	16
3		Two of the four aspects are met	9
2		One of the four aspects are met	8
1		No international participation	5

*Notes. There are two separate scores for three of the countries: Belgium, Serbia and Montenegro, and the United Kingdom.*

*The highlighted cells in the right column indicate the position of Romania.*

In 2009, the requirements to be fulfilled for achieving the third level of performance were both the international participation in review teams and the membership of an international QA network, as well . As a result, 14 of the 45 countries involved reached only level 2 (*some progress has been made*). The report underlined that there has been

some progress towards achieving a greater level of international involvement but the fact that quality assurance agencies from only 22 countries were full members of ENQA was unsatisfactory.

The 2012 report shows that the international participation in QA was highly uneven across the EHEA. As a first indicator, the criterion required the QA agencies to be full members of ENQA and/or listed on EQAR, along with other three indicators regarding the international peers/expert involvement in governance of national QA bodies, in evaluation teams or in follow-up procedures. Only eight countries reached level 5 of performance: Belgium (both Flemish and French Communities), Denmark, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland. Other seven countries were identified with no international participation: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Malta, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey and Ukraine.

Investigating the character and orientation of national quality assurance system, in 2012 the ability for higher education institutions to be evaluated by an agency from outside their country was examined. The authorities of 14 countries declared that all higher education institutions can be evaluated by an agency outside the national system. A further eight countries stated that in some cases higher education institutions are able to recourse to this procedure. However, because of the various legal provisions, the report revealed that there was a very diverse picture regarding this issue within EHEA.

For the 2015 report, the indicators concerning the international participation in QA were kept in their previous format. Data shows that the process of internalisation was growing since 2012, listing on EQAR and membership of ENQA displaying a significant progress, especially in Central and Eastern Europe countries. Also, involving international experts in national quality assurance processes became a mandatory norm in several states. The picture reveals 26 of 45 participant countries reaching very good or excellent performances.

The Bucharest Communiqué stated that opening up the possibility for higher education institutions to be evaluated by foreign agencies is one of the major commitments in the context of the Bologna Process. The results of the investigation conducted in 2012 led to the decision of the working-group to introduce this issue as a criterion for the external quality assurance in 2015. The developed scorecard demands show *the*

*level of openness to cross border quality assurance activity of EQAR registered agencies, with the following categories:*

Level 5 8 countries	All institutions and programmes can choose to be evaluated by a foreign QA agency to fulfil their obligations for external QA, while complying with national requirements. EQAR registration serves as a criterion for agencies to be allowed to carry out cross-border evaluation/accreditation/audit.
Level 4 4 countries	In some cases, institutions and/or programmes can choose to be evaluated by a foreign QA agency to fulfil their obligations for external QA, while complying with national requirements. EQAR registration serves as a criterion for agencies to be allowed to carry out cross-border evaluation/accreditation/audit.
Level 3 8 countries	In some or all cases, institutions and/or programmes can choose to be evaluated by a foreign QA agency to fulfil their obligations for external QA, but EQAR registration is not a criterion used to determine which agencies are allowed to carry out such cross-border evaluation/accreditation/audit.
Level 2 5 countries	Discussions are on-going or plans have been made to establish a legal framework allowing EQAR-registered agencies to operate in the country.
Level 1 23 countries	Institutions and programmes cannot be evaluated by QA agencies from outside the country to fulfil their obligations for external QA, and no plans are being discussed.

The results showed no significant progress since 2012. The findings were that level 5 was reached by 8 countries: Armenia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Azerbaijan, Liechtenstein, Poland and Romania. At the other end of the scale, there were 23 countries where institutions and programmes cannot be evaluated by QA agencies from outside their country.

The 2015 report concluded that higher education institutions are seeking to take advantage of collaborating with agencies from other countries, but the targeted national reforms on this objective are slow-moving.

***Case study. The Romanian international involvement in quality assurance***

Romania is a full member of the EHEA since 1999 and the first ex-communist country that, due to its progress in quality assurance, hosted a conference of the ministers responsible with higher education (Bucharest, 2012). Between 2004 and 2006 the required legislative framework for the implementation of the Bologna Process was developed. In June 2004, the *Romanian Team of Bologna Promoters (TBP)* was formed with support of the European Commission and included representatives of leading and staff of higher education institutions, representatives of students and of the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) (a structure under parliamentary control, having subordinated commissions of evaluation in fields and/or specializations, all functioning based on the regulations approved through governmental decision).

The general score for Romania in 2005 on quality assurance for the *Level of international participation, co-operation and networking*, was of *good performance* (level 3), along with other five countries: France, Italy, Malta, Russia and Slovenia.

The 2005 national report affirms the academic autonomy, also stated in the Romanian Constitution, and specified through the Education Law no 84/1995. The document shows that in Romania, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the national evaluation system in the entire education and, according to Law no. 88/1993, since 1993 the National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (CNEAA) has been responsible for quality assurance and accreditation procedures in the Romanian higher education area. The report also mentioned that CNEAA has no tasks concerning the international participation to the quality assurance process; instead, it is stated the fact that a new structure is to be developed – the Romanian Agency for the Quality Assurance in High Education (ARACIS) – which will carry these responsibilities.

Between 2005 and 2007, Romania adopted a few important documents such as: the Order of the Minister of Education no. 3928 from April 2005 concerning the quality of the educational services in higher education, the Emergency Ordinance no. 75 from July 2005 concerning the quality assurance of the educational services, and Law

no. 87/2006 for approving this ordinance. The 2007 National Report mentions as main achievements that the new adopted documents include provisions regarding the establishment of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) as an independent public institution of national interest, with legal personality and its own income and expenses, having competencies in accreditation, academic evaluation and external quality assurance. For the higher education institutions, Law no. 87/2006 provides the opportunity of external evaluation by other national or international agencies, based on a contract signed either by the Ministry of Education and Research or by the academic institution to be evaluated.

In 2006, ARACIS elaborated the external evaluation methodology that included the opportunity to include international experts, if possible, but not mandatorily, for the evaluation team and for the higher education institutions as well.

Like in 2005, the Bologna Scorecard for Romania in 2007 showed a *good performance* (level 3) for the *International participation* criterion, along with other fifteen countries: Albania, Belgium (the French Community), Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Turkey.

It must be underlined that in 2007, Romania became a member of the European Union, this status bringing several obligations that Romania undertook, including important transformations of the higher education system.

In the process of the national implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA, the European University Association (EUA) was invited to conduct an audit of ARACIS that took place during the academic year 2007/2008. Also in August-September 2008, the European Student Union (ESU) was invited to conduct an external evaluation of ARACIS, the results being comparable to those reported by the EUA. Following these steps, ARACIS initiated the process to become a full member of ENQA and to be registered in EQAR, events which took place in 2009.

The 2009 national report mentioned these achievements and also declared that international participation and cooperation in QA is carried out through involvement in various teams of evaluators as a member or observer. As a result, Romania reached level 4 (*very good performances*) on the scorecards for this criterion, as well as other

eleven countries: Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Macedonia and Turkey.

On international participation in 2012, Romania reached only level 2 (*some progress has been made*), alongside 10 other participants: Albania, Bosnia and Hertzegovina, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Northern Ireland, Slovakia, United Kingdom (except Scotland). The Romanian national report underlined that, according to the National Education Law adopted in 2011 and the Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2011 (completing the OE no. 75/2005), all higher education institutions can benefit from the opportunity of being evaluated by an outside country agency, which has to be an EQAR member.

This report also shows that international evaluators are involved in the external quality assurance process but not in governance structures, decision making processes or follow-up procedures, neither as full members, nor as observers in external review teams. No other information was provided on this subject. On the other hand, besides the ARACIS evaluation methodology (2006) which, as it was already mentioned, recommends the presence of an international evaluation expert, the changes made in 2010 to the ARACIS document "Guide for Quality Evaluation of University Study Programs and Higher Education Institutions" underlined that in the evaluation team an independent international expert must be included. However, starting with 2008, the international expert's report for each institution can be accessed on the ARACIS website, which hosts all the institutional evaluation reports of the team members. While these papers do not have a standardized form, their content is similar, referring to all major academic areas like structure, programs, students, staff, internationalization, specific outline, students' facilities, research activities.

In 2015, on the international participation, Romania obtained very good performance (level 4) as well as other fifteen participants: Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Lithuania, Portugal, United Kingdom (including Scotland), Northern Ireland, Russia, Iceland, Belgium (the Flemish Community). The National Report states that there are formal requirements for international experts to be involved as full members in external review teams and in follow-up procedures.

Regarding the *level of openness to cross border quality assurance activity of EQAR registered agencies*, the scorecards result for Romania

showed, as it was mentioned before, excellent performances (level 5), similar with other seven countries: Armenia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein and Poland.

### ***Conclusions***

The longitudinal comparative approach of the Bologna Scorecards results presented the European framework regarding the international participation on quality assurance within EHEA and leads to the conclusion that this issue is still a problem. According to the 2015 working group report, this area of QA registered the lowest progress since 2005, and it is highly uneven across the EHEA.

The study revealed a very diverse picture of this phenomenon, on both longitudinal and transversal directions. The source of the differences along the longitudinal axis is the fact that every year the criteria became more challenging. According to the national reports of the participant countries, the roots of variety on the transversal axis consist in legal or statutory issues as well as language obstacles.

In 2005, 12 of the 40 participant countries reached the requirement for level 5 - *excellent progresses* benchmark (*Figure 1*), which was the international participation at three levels: in the governance of QA national bodies, in the external review teams and membership of ENQA or other international networks. In 2007, the international participation in external evaluation of the national QA agencies was introduced as mandatory, thus only 11 of the 45 countries achieved the highest level of performance. In 2009, the indicators used in 2007 were maintained, but their grouping manner for achieving certain level of performance was more challenging; consequently, only 16 of the 45 participant countries reached level 5. The international peers/experts participation in follow-up procedures was a new request in 2012 and 2015; 8 countries reached the highest level of performance in 2012 and 10 in 2015.

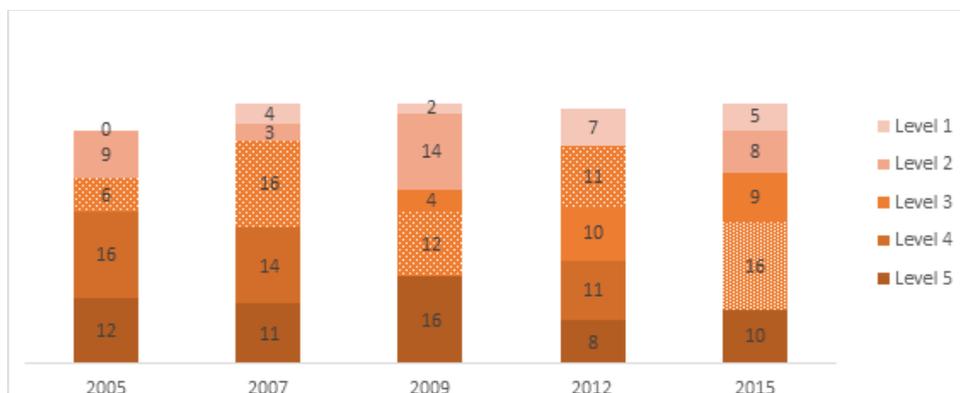


Figure 1. Number of countries situated on each level of performance (the areas with pattern fill represent the Romanian results)

Romania also faced higher targets every year, being an EHEA member since 1999. Due to its progress regarding quality assurance in higher education, it was the first ex-communist country hosting a conference of the ministers responsible with the higher education (Bucharest 2012). Between 2004 and 2006, the requirements for the implementation of Bologna system were undertaken, and between 2005 and 2007 several important documents concerning quality assurance in education were adopted. The working group that developed the Bologna scorecards exercise evaluated Romania's achievements on international participation in QA as *good performances* (level 3) in 2005 and 2007, as *very good performances* (level 2) in 2009 and 2015, and stated that *some progress has been made* (level 4) in 2012.

The Romanian case study, especially the recorded decrease in 2012 has brought to light another possible reason for the results' inconstancy, namely reasons related to the accuracy of the reported information and/or to the various perspective on the international participation concept.

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# ***Revisiting the Organisational Identification Assessment from a Managerial Perspective: A Case Study on a Romanian Public University***

**Simona Mălăescu, Dan Chiribucă, Anamaria Bogdan, Sonia Pavlenko, Monica Petric, Adriana Șerban, Oana Tămaș**

*Centre for University Strategy and Quality Management,  
Babeș-Bolyai University, 1. M. Kogălniceanu St. Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
simona.malaescu@ubbcluj.ro*

**Abstract:** Although there is a large body of literature on organizational identification (OID), in recent years few of them have addressed the higher education context, mostly on student's identification and rarely on the identification of academic and research staff. Of these, their main focus is usually on different constructs, exploring OID in its role as mediator/moderator of these organizational issues and most often only one form of OID is acknowledged. The theoretical progress is evident, the essential necessity for large organizations to foster a sense of oneness in employees is acknowledged. However, from a managerial perspective, the issues of how many or which antecedents should be nurtured in this context in order to obtain results and the doubtful adaptability of considering just one form of OID are almost a decade old. This paper presents and discusses the results of a survey carried out on 1072 academics and researchers from Babes-Bolyai University, Romania. By assessing three forms of OID (OID, ambivalent identification and neutral identification) and certain relevant antecedents in the case of a large public university, the study addresses a gap in recent literature. Results are consistent with the *Extended Model of Organizational Identification* and strengthen the need to acknowledge the operational importance of ambivalent and neutral identification from a managerial perspective in the case of higher education employees. Theoretical contributions and practical implications of results are also discussed.

**Keywords:** organizational identification, human resources, higher education

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## ***Introduction***

In the first two decades of organisational identification literature, researchers focused on its antecedents as well as the consequences of the employees' organisational identification, producing valuable insight for managers trying to make sense of and to manage better complex organizations and the manner in which these interact with their environment. Organisational identification (OID) has the potential of generating a series of positive results both at the level of the organization as well as the level of the individuals (He & Brown, 2013), starting from a feeling of wellbeing and an increased employees' satisfaction at the job (Abrams & De Moura, 2001; Yuan et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2016) up to a higher employee performance (Mael & Ashforth, 1995; Bhattacharya et al., 1995; van Knippenberg, 2000; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000; Riketta, 2005; Ashforth et al., 2008; Callea et al., 2016; Turen et al., 2017; Conroy et al., 2017) or in-role performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Vinh Nhat Lu et al., 2017). Both task-specific performance (Hekman et al., 2016) as well as the overall performance at the workplace have been linked to OID (Walumbwa et al. 2008; Weiseke et al. 2008; Conroy et al., 2017).

The employees' creativity, seen as their capacity of generating original ideas meant to improve their tasks as well as their efficiency on the one hand, and the organisation's efficiency on the other (Amabile et al. 1996), has also been linked to OID (Hirst & van Knippenberg, 2009; Madjar et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2016) – a natural process when the interests and wellbeing of the individual converge and identify with those of the organisation s/he is part of, as a result of a greater creative effort (He & Brown 2013).

One of the important mechanisms through which the creative effort mediates the impact of identification on creativity relies on the employees' willingness to put in a greater effort in improving their tasks and in making the organisation more efficient (Hirst et al. 2009; He & Brown 2013).

Other behaviours and attitudes of the employees, that are relevant for the beneficial functioning of an organisation and which have been connected to OID have been represented by: the intention of remaining in the organisation on long-term, citizenship behaviour within the

organisation (organisational behavioral citizenship – OBC)(Van Dick 2001; Wu et al., 2016; Bang Nguyen et al, 2016; Callea et al., 2016; Schun et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2016; Costa Neves Cavazotte et al., 2017; Vinh Nhat Lu et al. 2017), job turnover intentions (Cole & Bruch, 2006; Tavares et al., 2016; Fallatah et al. 2017), proactive work behaviors of voice and taking charge (Klimchak et al. 2016), knowledge sharing and knowledge integration (Bao et al., 2017), team spirit (Riketta & Van Dick 2005), in-role behaviour and extra-role behaviour (Ma et al., 2016; Lam et al., 2016; Tavares et al., 2016) up until the unethical pro-organizational behavior (Chen et al., 2016; Kong, 2016). Moreover, the higher the organisational identification, the lower the employees' intention of leaving the organisation (Liu & Ngo, 2017) as well as their actual leaving of the organisation (Abrams et al. 1998; Bartel 2001; Costa Neves Cavazotte et al., 2017), unethical behaviors, resistance to organizational change or interpersonal conflict (Conroy et al., 2017).

In a meta-analysis on OID, He & Brown (2013) quote some of the few studies (especially due to the difficult access to data) which have highlighted the connection between OID of the employees and the organisations' financial performance (Homburg et al. 2009; Weiseke et al. 2008).

Recent studies massively concentrate the focus on studying OID as a mediator/moderator of the aforementioned outcomes or new ones (*Table 1*). The mediation relationship is usually confirmed. In several situations the impact of OID on the outcome variable is theorised as being also mediated by another variable, for example the organization-based self-esteem, job engagement, and felt obligation toward the organization on the impact on OCB (Wu et al., 2016), the personal identification with the leader on the impact of OID upon job turnover intentions (Fallatah et al, 2017), personal factors (morality, other identifications) on the impact of OID upon the negative behaviors and attitude such as unethical behaviors, resistance to organizational change, lower performance, interpersonal conflict, negative emotions, and reduced well-being (Conroy et al., 2017) or the moral disengagement upon the unethical pro-organizational behavior (Chen et al., 2016).

*Table 1. Studies exploring the organisational identification in the mediator or moderator role (2016-2017)*

<b>Outcome Variable</b>	<b>Role of IOD</b>	<b>Predictor</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Result</b>
Attachment and turnover	MED	change in personal status, organizational valence	corporate merge	Sung et al., 2017	confirmed
Employee job crafting	MED	transformational leadership	corporate	Wang et al., 2017	Partially confirmed (low IOD emp.)
OCB, intention to leave			federal public institutions	Costa Neves Cavazotte et al., 2017	confirmed
Financial professionals' loyalty	MED	ethical leadership	Financial (Taiwan)	Tseng et al., 2017	Significantly mediated
Employees' job performance	MED	perc. qual. of organizationally provided meal serv.	Private security-sector (Turkey)	Turen et al., 2017	partial mediating
Employees' pro-environmental behaviour	MED	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	private employees	Gkorezis & Petridou, 2017	Confirmed
Supportive CSR outcomes	MED	CSR partnership	Non profit organisations	Rim et al., 2017	
Employee entitlement	MOD			Klimchak et al., 2016	Significant moderation
In-role performance and organizational	MED MOD	psychological contracts	Frontline triads in hotels	Vinh Nhat Lu et al., 2017	Partially mediated
Post negative event and pro-organiz.	MED	impact of negative event	National Colleg. Athletic Ass.	Zavyalova et al., 2016	High rep. when low IOD

behavior					negative output
Emp. extra-role behavior	MED	POS	nurses (China)	Lam et al., 2016	confirmed
Citizenship behavior	MED	workplace ostracism	China	Wu et al., 2016	confirmed
Unethical pro-organizational behavior	predicator		China and the United States	Chen et al., 2016	confirmed
Willingness to engage in OCB	MED		broad spectrum	Schun et al., 2016	significant
Nurses' silence towards patient safety	MED	workplace ostracism	Nursing (Ciprus)	Gkorezis et al., 2016	partially mediated
Proactive work behaviors (voice and taking charge)	MOD	employee entitlement		Klimchak et al., 2016	significant moderation
Unethical pro-organizational behavior	MED	work passion, POS	U.S.	Kong, 2016	IOD mediates only on low mindfulness
Knowledge sharing/integration	MED	trust	Chinese companies	Bao et al., 2017	Partially mediated
Subordinate affiliative behaviors	MED	self-sacrificial leadership	China	Li et al., 2016	Confirmed
In-role behaviour and extra-role behaviour	MED	job security	Chinese air transportation group	Ma et al., 2016	partially mediated
Employees' intrapreneurial behaviors	MED	authentic leadership,		Edu Valsania et al., 2016	Confirmed
OCB	MED	socially responsible HR management	employees-supervisors (China)	Newman et al., 2016	fully mediated (employee-oriented)

					HRM)
Job satisfaction	MED	high-performance work systems	Diff. level enterprise emp.	Liu et al., 2016	Partially mediate
Voice and negative feedback seeking behavior	MED	servant leadership	food company (Pakistan)	Chughtai, 2016	Partially mediates
OCB, job performance	MED	qualitative job insecurity	Western contex	Callea et al., 2016	completely mediated
Job satisfaction	MOD oderat or of the impac t of	organizational justice		Yuan et al., 2016	Significantl y in low OID
Employee creativity	MED	leadership Abusive supervision		Liu et al., 2016	confirmed

Sometimes the interaction between IOD and its mediator, for example the perceived organisational climate (ethical/non-ethical) on the moral decisions of employees, proved to be more relevant than the separate role (van Gils et al., 2017). Among the variables proved to moderate the influence of OID in recent studies were collectivism, power distance, and future orientation on the impact on citizenship behavior (Wu et al., 2016), expected psychological contract on OCB (Bang Nguyen et al, 2016), competitive interorganizational relations on the impact on unethical pro-organizational behavior (Chen et al., 2016), trauma on the impact on work-family conflict in the case of fire-fighters (Allen et al, 2016).

### **Antecedents and forms of Organisational Identification**

Aiming the optimisation of organisational performance by improving the aforementioned aspects (and considering them as being connected as well to the organisational identification), a series of research studies

in the field of organisational management addressed the factors that are the premises of OID. Recent studies made a wide range of connections (*Table 1*) between OID and other organisational or leadership characteristics, in some cases mediated or moderated as well, by other relevant variables.

*Table 2. Antecedent variables of organisational identification and mediators/moderators under study in recent research (2016-2017)*

<b>Antecedent variable</b>	<b>Moderator/mediator</b>	<b>Sample/context</b>	<b>Authors</b>
interpersonal and informational justice	psychological contract fulfillment, different levels of equity sensitivity	Comercial banks employees (emp.)	Asadullah et al, 2017
internal and external corporate social responsibility	social and cultural orientations	fast-moving consumer goods conglomerate emp.	Farooq et al., 2017
organizational valence change in personal status	personal valence	Corporate context	Sung et al., 2017
injunctive logics (pre-entry beliefs), descriptive logics (actual experience)		healthcare context (newcomers)	Smith et al., 2017
authentic leadership	personal identification with the leader	Nursing (newcomers)	Fallatah et al., 2017
corporate social responsibility (CSR)	employee engagement	information technology emp. (Assia)	Gupta, 2017
gender role orientation and career/family role salience		three (large) companies in China	Liu & Ngo, 2017
foreign ownership and foreign parent's		Korean managers (multinational corporations)	Lee et al., 2017

control			
internal and external CSR	Mediator (MED): perceived external prestige and perceived internal respect; Moderator (MOD): calling orientation	(Large) multinationals (Pakistan)	Hameed et al., 2016
authentic leadership	MED: Cynicism	white collar employees	Kurt, 2016
POS	OID MED along with affective commitment MOD: collectivism	Nurses (China)	Lam et al., 2016
work passion (obsessive passion), POS	MED: trait indfulness MED IOD of antecedents on unethical pro-org.behavior	U.S.	Kong, 2016
perceived CSR	MED (successive) Interacts with overall justice through the successive mediation of perceived external prestige and organizational pride	international utility company	De Roeck et al., 2016
Age		professional sports	Bergmann et al., 2016
CSR	MED: employee's internal motivation	restaurant industry (Taiwan)	Lu et al., 2016
CRS	MED: meaningful work MOD: ethical leadership	Aviation company emp. (Turkey)	Akdogan et al., 2016

Apart from the work of The Expanded model of Organisational Identification's authors (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Ashforth, 2008) few studies acknowledged the existence of more than one way for the employees of identifying themselves with the organisation they work for. Along with Carlin et al. (2010) revalidating on a different context the initial extended model proposed by Kreiner and Ashfort (2004), Hoyer (2016) revealed the (not so negative) role of ambiguous organisational identification, Schuh et al. (2016) explored the antecedents and consequences of ambivalent identification and OID, and Humphreys & Brown (2002) on their early work, enhanced the evidence on two of Elsbach (1999) forms dis-identification and neutral identification, and also schizo-identification (Humphreys & Brown, 2002, p. 421) the last study being the only study undertook on a higher education context.

This scarce preoccupation of assessing more than one form of OID in recent overwhelming literature is surprising considering the complexity and the equivocal character of some organisations (a situation which applies to comprehensive universities), the autonomy of the personnel and the flexible and dynamic character of the aims, values and beliefs of the individuals that characterise today's society.

Early researchers have noticed the situation in which the employees, at the same time, identify with certain aspects, values or practices of the organisation they work for and they disidentify with others (Kreiner & Ashfort 2004; Dukerich et al. 1998; Elsbach 1999; Ashfort 2001), a situation for which they introduced the term ambivalent identification (AID) (or conflictual identification) (Kreiner & Ashfort, 2004, p. 4). Kreiner & Ashfort (2004) consider that the organisations in which this type of identification lacks are rather rare, and also think that the vision that disconsiders it would be a rather reductionist one.

In the organisations where the employees have ambivalent identification, the main drawback is the fact that they show reserves in exceeding the requested level of professional performance and consume cognitive and emotional resources which otherwise could be channelled towards supporting more productive organisational objectives. While the components of ambivalence that reflect positive associations are encouraged by the majority of the organisations, the negative ones are discourages, "this mixed message can create isolation and stress for the ambivalent individual as well as perceptions of hypocrisy and pressure to conform" (Meyerson & Scully 1995 in Kreiner & Ashfort 2004, p. 4).

Research has also shown the situation in which, in the case of an employee, there lacks explicitly both the attachment or the perception of a congruence or identification with the defining elements of the employing organisation, as well as an explicit incongruence or incompatibility with its defining values. In short: a lack of both identification as well as disidentification of the employee with the organisation they work for; a situation designated by Elsbach (1999) as neutral identification (NID).

The employees who are in such a situation can define themselves cognitively in personal terms (as being, for example "singular": or "independent" or "autonomous": "*I'm a loner; I'm my own person*");

avoiding consciously the extremes of the attachment (either positive or negative) towards the organisation, as a result of previous experiences with the organisation they have worked for, or of the leadership styles they have experienced (*‘I don’t take sides, I just do my job’*) (Kreiner & Ashfort 2004, p. 5).

In the view of the authors of this study, this explicit absence of identification or disidentification is the self-definition of an employee represents a “suboptimal state; an employee defining him or herself as neutral towards the organisation (and its goals, values, mission) is less likely to feel engaged in and contribute to the organisation than one who does, particularly via extra role behaviors (Kreiner & Ashforth 2004, p. 5).

Considering the practical value of the evidence like Kreiner and Ashforth’s findings that a positive reputation of the organisation can forestall disidentification and possibly AID, and an internally congruent organisational identity can forestall ambivalence and possibly neutrality or the fact that OID and AID interactively influence employees’ willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour but this impact is significantly reduced when employees experience AID (Schuh et al., 2016) we argue for the imperious necessity to assess two other forms (AID and NID) of employees (especially in the situation of higher education staff) manners to position themselves at what their employer organisation values and stands for. This approach, along with selecting the most relevant antecedents for the particular context universities operates on in order to obtain accurate and relevant information stood at the basis of the present research endeavour.

The literature review (see also *Table 1-2*) reveals that few studies were carried on higher education contexts and the majority of them on students OID or alumni (Zavyalova et al., 2016) and very few on staff and mostly qualitative in nature (Puusa & Kekale, 2015; Humphreys & Brown, 2002).

In all studies what stands out, comparing with the studies on other contexts (table 1 and 2), are the acknowledged importance and impact of IOD more than other processes (like social identification) over student commitment, achievement and satisfaction (Wilkins et al., 2016) and the choice of antecedents under study: some of them were university (organisation’s) characteristics, like the construed external image of the university (Myers et al., 2016), university brand

personality, university brand knowledge, and university brand prestige (Balaji et al., 2016), other were individual's reaction variables inspired by the organisation like satisfaction and trust in the university (Myers et al., 2016) or finally, environmental characteristics like perceived interorganizational competition (Myers et al., 2016). OID was found a strong predictor of student satisfaction (Wilkins et al., 2016) and strongly related with university-supportive behaviours such as university affiliation, suggestions for improvement, advocacy intentions, and participation in future activities (Balaji et al., 2016) including intended future involvement (Myers et al., 2016). Also students who identify with their university perceive their destiny as interweaved with the university which drives their desire to engage in university supportive behaviors (Balaji et al., 2016). Although OID was a strong predictor of satisfaction, student commitment was better at explaining student achievement (Wilkins et al., 2016).

Except for the evident and dominant focus on CSR (as an indirect and singular) measure of what the employees' organisations value and stand for, the majority of recent literature on other organisational contexts, apart from assessing a unique form of OID, don't cover much of the relevant antecedents which usually determine the actual identification/ deidentification process of the employee. Schuh et al. (2016) however, shown that employees' promotion and prevention focus form differential relationships with organizational identification and ambivalent identification, providing first evidence for a link between employees' regulatory focus and the dynamics of identification. A particular attention registered the perceived organisational support.

The employees perceiving their hiring organisation as being concerned with their wellbeing are more likely to offer, in their turn, investing psychologically in the organisation and developing a feeling of attachment and identification towards the organisation itself (Eisenberger et al. 2001). Edwards & Peccei (2010) stress the fact that the perceived organisational support may contribute to the fulfilment of important socio-emotional needs of the employees, such as positive self-esteem, approval or affiliation need (Lee & Peccei, 2007), which can intensify the identification and the emotional attachment to the organisation (Sung et al., 2017), leading to incorporating their member

quality and their role status into their social identity (Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002).

The recent reminder of the importance of assessing the organisational values broth by Myers et al. (2016) stressing that students' identification with their university reflects value congruence with the institution, satisfaction and trust, points out the necessity to revisit the basic key elements (organisational values and mission) in the approach of assessing and rising OID in universities, considering their core mission. The employees' OID is present when they define themselves at least partially by using elements that describe what the organisation represents and supports (mission, vision, etc.) (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004) or when they perceive that they form a unit together with the organisation and feel that they belong to it (Ashforth & Mael 1989).

This conceptualisation of organisational identification relies on the social identity perspective, where one individual's social identity consists in being aware of the status of a member of a social group, together with the values and the emotional significance attached to this member status (Tajfel 1978) and thus, the organisation they work for may constitute that social category which the employee can later identify with (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Haslam 2004). Taking into account the complexity of the organisational environment offered by the universities to their employees, of the latter's individuality and autonomy, in the attempt to offer an image of the level of identification of a large public university` employees, in this study we chose an extended theoretical model of identification (Kreiner & Ashfort 2004).

Babeş-Bolyai University (BBU) is a public comprehensive university of advanced research and education, the largest Romanian university in terms of student numbers and consists of 21 faculties (organized into 94 teaching departments) and over 40 research units. In various rankings, BBU is ranked among the best universities in Romania and has a comparable performance with other similar universities from the region (Eastern and Central Europe), in 2016, in a metaranking of the Romanian Ministry of Education, BBU was ranked as the best Romanian university. One defining characteristic of BBU is its multiculturalism mirroring the multi-ethnic tradition of the geographical region for which provides academic training: it has three lines of study, e.g. Romanian, Hungarian and German, that allow a complete university

route (from bachelor to doctorate) to be completed in the chosen language (apart from study programmes in international languages, such as English, French, etc.)

Of the organisational antecedents selected in the initial model, in the case of a comprehensive university, based on previous research results, we considered necessary to evaluate mainly the organisational and individual antecedents and less those connected to the position that the employees hold. From the point of view of the generated directions for action, we considered useful apart from key organisational characteristics like the organisational identity strength(OIS) (Kreiner & Ashforth 2004; Puusa et al., 2015) and the organizational identity incongruence (OIDI) (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), individual variable relevant for this profession as the need for organisational identification (NDOID) (Glynn 1998, Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004) or the professional commitment (Blau 1989; Van Mannan & Barley 1984; Caza & Creary 2016) and individual characteristics.

A strong organisational identity is defined as being widely shared and deeply respected by its members (Kreiner & Ashforth 2004). Organisations with a strong organisational identity offer a clear point of reference regarding their organisational identity ("*This is who we are*"), allowing their employees to decide whether the organisation fits their needs and wished, and attracting the potential employees who resonate with its mission and values (Ashforth & Mael 1996; Kreiner & Ashforth 2004). The strength or force of organisational identification is thus considered to be a consistent antecedent for the members' organisational identification. According to the positive or negative value of the identification, this indicator can be also an antecedent of disidentification, as the force of identification intensifies, as the case may be, the association or dissociation with the organisation's image.

The organizational identity incongruence was conceptualized as the situation in which an organisation send contradictory or mixed messages to its stakeholders in connection to what it is that it supports (which are the aspects that are important for the organisation) and their argumentation.

The organisations may develop multiple or hybrid identities, which could evolve into contradictory situations, especially in the situations in which the organisations are confronted with contradictory requirements from the environment they operate in (such as the need

for a high performance and cost reduction), of the key stakeholders or are in a state of flux (Kreiner & Ashforth 2004). Mainly, an identity incongruence represents the premises for forming the AID. Taking into consideration the reduced added value from a practical perspective of the information potentially yielded by the added evaluation of the fourth form of identification proposed by the extended model - disidentification in comparison to the evaluation of the other three identification forms for the case of a university (such as predicting employee mobility, predicting the leaving of the organisation by these employees, etc.) we opted for restricting the instrument to the three already mentioned forms of organisational identification. Evaluating the manner in which, at the level of BBU, employees perceive the force of organisational identity and the level of organisational incongruence represents an objective of interest in itself, independent from the role it might play in the formation of another type of organisational identification.

The need for organisational identification can be described as being the members' predisposition for identifying with the organisation they are part of. Even though all individuals belonging to an organisation are somewhat receptive to identifying with it (as part of defining the self and of belonging), the levels at which they do it depend on how willing they are to be imprinted (Glynn 1998, p. 234) by the organisation (Glynn 1998; Kreiner & Ashforth 2004). Professional commitment is defined, when it is conceptualised as a uni-dimensional construct, as the belief and acceptance by an individual of the values lying at the basis of its occupation and the wish to maintain the status of the member of that profession (Vandenberg & Scarpello 1994). Individuals can build a social identity defined by their professional role, relying on aspect taken from their profession or from their organisation (Van Mannan & Barley 1984; Caza & Creary 2016).

Considering the need for quantitative research and empirical new evidence in the context of higher education institutions' staff identified, this study aims to assess the level and forms of organisational identification of the teaching and research personnel of a large public university as well as the main variable underpinning their crystallisation in the national context in which the university is operating.

This diagnosis, as well as the operational information connected to the main directions of action aimed at stimulating the employees' organisational identification, as a lever for stimulating the set of elements that this has been connected with serve the main purpose of understanding and of improving the complex manner in which the university, as an organisation, functions and especially achieves performance. We expect that AID and NID, in the case of a higher education institution's personnel will represent a significant manner to position themselves in respect of their employing organisation and that each of the forms will have different salient antecedents. We also expect that the organisational characteristics selected as antecedents will be also significantly connected with employees satisfaction with the university and its organisational values.

### ***Methodology***

Evaluating the level of OID was carried out through an survey based on a pen-and-paper questionnaire, applied to the entire teaching and research staff. The response rate at the level of the 21 faculties of the university varied: 15 faculties has response rates of over 50%.

*Participants.* A number of 1072 academics and researchers responded to our survey, in the resulted sample the most important quota, for each academic ranks, matched the quota in the general population. The main descriptive data of the sample of participants and the comparison to the general population at the level of the university are shown in Table 3.

*Instruments* In order to evaluate the level of organisational identification, we opted for the instrument built by Kreiner & Ashforth (2004), namely the Organisational Identification Measure, considered to be a much more comprehensive instrument for the nature and the strength of the attachment between the employee and the employer (Carlin et al. 2010). Consequently, most studies published in the field use sub-scales or compare themselves one way or another to the model, and the instrument, respectively, used by the afore-mentioned authors. From the instrument used by the authors in their 2004 study, we used the following subscales: Ambivalent Identification, Neutral

Identification, Need for Identification, Organisational Identity Incongruence, Organisational Identity Strength for validating the initial model, and the Organisational Identification refined by Mael & Ashforth (Mael 1988 unpublished; Mael & Ashforth 1992). In order to measure the other antecedent variables and the consequences considered relevant for the context of higher education, we used: Professional Commitment (Blau 1989) for its unidimensional conceptualisation of the engagement towards profession and an item adapted among those suggested by Lockwood et al. (2002) for evaluating values such as promoting organisational success / avoiding organisational failure (“In this university, achieving performance is more important than avoiding/preventing failure”).

All the items of the instrument of all sub-scales required that the subject rate on a Likert scale in five points to what extent the statements described various manners of relating to the organisation, to their profession, correspond to their situation. Another four items were suggested by the team who carried out this research for the arguments mentioned above for each individual dimension. Two of the items were represented by “In this university the individual initiatives are supported (individualism)”; “In this university the collective interest matters more than the individual interest (collectivism)” and used the same response scale as the other items. A third one represented a scale of “Very pleased – Very displeased” for measuring the satisfaction with the organisation. A fourth item, which was an adaptation of the identification graphic scale was used to evaluate the level of overlapping perceived by what on the one hand the organisation represents and what it supports in its entirety (BBU in this case) and, on the other hand, the nucleus department the investigating individual is a member of.

	Teaching staff (primary)		Gender		Research Staff (exc.)		Academic rank (from total UBB %)			
	Indiv.	%	M%	F%	Indiv.	%	TA	L	AP	P
<b>BBU General population</b>	1472	83,6	50	50	290	16,4	9,25	36,42	25	12,8
<b>IOD sample</b>	858	80,1	72(d)	289(d)	214	19,9	45,3		34,1	

Table 3. Descriptive demographic of the sample and general population of research and teaching staff of BBU

Of the consequences of organisational identification, we considered relevant for this research the satisfaction with the organisation and organisational values, such as promoting organisational success/preventing organisational failure (Lockwood et al. 2002) (the latter being previously highlighted as potential moderators of the impact of organisational identification on other result variables). Lockwood et al (2002) highlight especially the idea that Eastern societies, that are more collectivist from a cultural point of view, tend to manifest stronger and more independent self-constructs, focusing on themselves as part of a network of interpersonal relationships (Heine et al 1999).

Thus, their members are more motivated to adapt to a group and to maintain social harmony, tending to focus on tasks and responsibilities towards others and to avoid behaviours leading to disruptions or to disappointing of significant people (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis 1989; Lockwood et al. 2002). In the initial model, *individualism* was conceptualised as a premises for the neutral identification and assessed the employees' propensity towards placing personal aims above the collective ones (Triandis et al. 1986), by contrast with the subordination of personal aims to the collective good, specific to *collectivism*. In this research, by measuring the cognitive schemes of *individualism* and of *collectivism*, respectively, we were rather interested in exploring how the employees use these schemes in understanding the academic environment and the probability that a majority of individuals would behave in a manner congruent with the individualist or collectivist values, norms, beliefs and assumptions, in context that are significant for the academic behaviour.

## ***Results and Discussion***

The analysis carried out at the level of the entire sample revealed a high level of BBU employees' identification with the organisation they are part of, in which over 75% of the employees included in the investigation present an absolute above average level of identification (Sample average – 21, of a maximum of 30) (Figure 1). OID represents at the same time the dominant form of relating for 70% of the BBU employees to what the university represents and supports (its mission,

vision, etc.) and perceive themselves as belonging, and as forming, respectively, a unit with the organisation they work for. 22% of the teaching and research staff of the university relates in an ambivalent manner to the organisation they are part of fact which seems a natural occurrence in today's context and given the higher level of individual autonomy that is specific for the employees of higher education institutions.

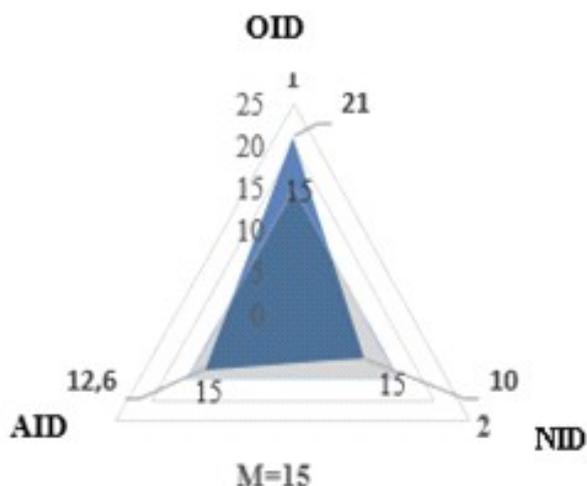


Figure 1. Organisational Identification of UBB teaching and research personnel

Given some antagonistic requirements and constraints that universities have to face and the distancing of the majority of the organisations from the univocal relating of their employees, the fact that a quarter of its staff manifest an ambivalent identification to the employer university just enhance the importance in acknowledging the existence of this form of positioning in the case of universities. Another 5% of the investigated staff presents as their dominant characteristic a form of neutral identification in relation to the university, while in the case of the remaining 3% there could not be identified a dominant manner of relation, mainly due to the reduced rate of response to those items.

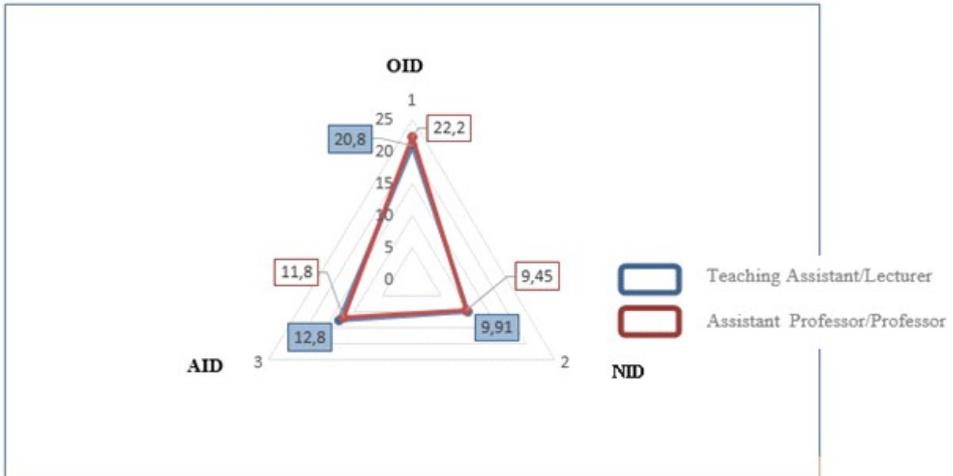


Figure 2. Organisational Identification of UBB teaching personnel (mean scores of each identification form in teaching subpopulation)

Among the teaching staff, the percentage of OID as a dominant form of employees' relating to the organisation they are part of grows up to 74%, given the lower percentage (18%) in comparison with the percentage at the level of the entire sample, of the academics who show an AID with the elements supported by the organisation they are part of.

The analysis of academic ranks (*Figure 2*) revealed that among the academics that hold the positions of Associate Professor and Professor there is a higher level of OID ( $M = 22.2$  – the highest value of all analysed sub-populations) in comparison to those holding the positions of Assistant Lecturer and Lecturer, which show the lowest average value of all the categories analysed (20.8). Among the female staff who hold the higher academic positions, the average of organisational identification decreases slightly ( $M = 21.95$ ) in comparison to the male population from those particular academic ranks, differing from the female segment on the academic ranks of assistant lecturer and lecturer where a higher level of organisational identification is recorded ( $M = 21.2$ ) than for the male population.

The AID forms record the highest average among the staff in the positions of assistant lecturer and lecturer, respectively ( $M = 12.8$ ) and is higher when taking into consideration only the results of the female

staff at this academic level ( $M = 13.1$ ). Again, among the female staff holding the positions of Associate Professor and Professor the averages were lower ( $M = 11.6$ ). The NID at the level of both higher and lower academic positions recoded rather close values and near the averages of the entire sample – the lowest value being recorded again among females staff on higher academic positions ( $M = 9.11$ ). In the analysis carried out on the teaching staff taking into consideration the lines of study, the data revealed a slightly highly level of OID in the case of the 172 academics surveyed who declared to be working for the Hungarian line of study ( $M = 21.8$ ), followed by the Romanian line of study. The AID form also records a higher average and sensibly equal among the academics of the Hungarian and Romanian lines of study.

Table 4. Correlation matrix of variables connected with the forms of OID in BBU

Variable	OID	NID	AID	OIS	OIDI	NDOID	Prof.C	Indiv.	Coll.	VAI	Satisf
OID		-0,392	-0,233	0,471	-0,323	0,591	0,431	0,399	0,170	0,329	0,411
NID			0,442	-0,294	0,382	-0,394	-0,527	-0,267	-0,143	-0,211	-0,333
AID				-0,478	0,634	-0,170	-0,417	-0,417	-0,482	-0,174	-0,567
OIS					-0,650	0,299	0,322	0,554	0,276	0,354	0,612
OIDI						-0,243	-0,379	-0,490	-0,262	0,330	-0,572
NDOID							0,301	0,237	0,141	0,193	0,253
Prof.C								0,346	0,094	0,207	0,385
Ind.									0,210	0,347	0,525
Coll.										0,342	0,202
VAI											0,356
Satisf											0,63*

All correlations are significant at the 0,01 level unless specified otherwise

\* The correlation is significant at the 0,05 level.

<sup>n</sup> The correlation is not significant

The correlational analysis revealed that of the forms of identification, at the level of academics, the most significant relation with satisfaction manifested towards the organisation was register by AID, which correlated the strongest and negatively (-.57) with the employees' satisfaction towards the organisation they are part of (Table 4), followed by the positive correlation with organisational identification (.42) and also the reverse correlation with the neutral identification (-.33). The strongest relationship of satisfaction towards the organisation was registered with the strength of organisational identification (-.62). These findings indicates the need for further exploration of the role of OIS and AID, along with OIDI and IOD in predicting satisfaction towards the organisation in order to obtain directions for action targeting the improving of the level of satisfaction and identification of the teaching staff.

As we assumed in the theoretical decision of evaluating in the case of teaching staff the need for identification and their professional engagement, the data indicated the strongest connection to be between the level of organisational identification and the need for individual identification (.614), followed by the professional engagement (.41), wich justify the need to revisit the extended model of OID in the higher education context.

## ***Conclusions***

Despite the extensive litterature on organisational identification few studies were undercarried on higher education contexts and mostly on students or alumni indenfication with their university. Also, considering the amount of studies, the litterature carried out on more than one form of OID is surprisingly scarce. Apart from mediation or moderation models exploring detailed facets (mostly just) of OID, comprehensive models on the antecedents, forms and outcomes of OID are rarely empirically tested.

Most of the studies on higher education context offers and empirically test comprehensible theoretical models, based usually on social identity theory (Balaji et al., 2016; Myers et al., 2016) enhancing the need of what seems to be a basic necessity from the practical perspective on this context. Moreover, studies carried on higher

education contexts propose theoretical models in which select antecedents of OID which are obviously particular in relevance comparing with the one considered relevant in non-academic contexts' literature. On this issue, present study's findings revealed that Need for Identification, Organisational Identity Incongruence and Organisational Identity Strength are particularly relevant for the manner scholars do position themselves in respect to what the employer university value and stands for and also their satisfaction with the organisation in which they work.

Results are consistent with the extended model of organisational identification proposed by Kreiner and Ashforth (2004), Puusa & Kekale (2015) enhancing the evidence that not just the external image of the university (Myers et al., 2016) but also the internal one, or its consistency (Balaji et al., 2016) impacts the employees identification. The significant relation registered by the strength of organisational identification (negative), ambivalent identification (negative), organisational identification (positive) with the employees' satisfaction towards the organisation is also consistent with Wilkins et al. (2016) findings on student's satisfaction with the university and OID, Liu et al. (2016) who brought evidence that OID partially mediates satisfaction or Yuan et al. (2016) who found that on low OID the impact of organisational justice on satisfaction is significant. These findings theoretically enhance the need to further explore the predictive role of organisational strengths or organisational incongruence over employees satisfaction with their organisation in the case of academic staff.

The role registered by AID in the context of academics and the strong(est) connection registered by AID to the level of perceived organisational incongruence enhance the necessity to acknowledge the natural state of facts in the higher education context given the antagonistic requirements and constraints that universities have to face, their employee's individuality and autonomy and gives enough reason to revisit the extended model of identification and the importance in acknowledging the existence of this form of positioning in the case of universities. From the managerial perspective AID and the strong relationship with the organisational incongruence will be the main future concern – i.e. further explore and establish the nature of the incongruent aspects and improving these elements.

The scores recorded by the AID against the background of the other two forms of identification, at the level of the entire investigated personnel underlines the incipient presence of this representation in the case of the majority of employees; however, nowadays the organisational identification is dominant. However, we obtained the first directions for action targeting the improving of the level of satisfaction and identification of the teaching staff, namely reducing the perceived level of organisational incongruence, increasing the force or strength of BBU's identity as an organisation and reducing, as a consequence, the ambivalent identity.

The perceived differences between what the organisation stands and what the department believe, value and stands for confirmed the conclusions of Puusa & Kekale (2015, p. 432) which stressed out "how slow and difficult it is to introduce major changes at the practical level, and that psychological realities at the departmental and organisational levels tend to be different".

Also, under the reserve of the reduced number of academics included in the study who declared that they teach mainly within the German line of study, special attention is due to the values recorded by the neutral identification, higher than in the case of all the other analysed sub-populations, because, while on the ambivalent identification one can act by transmitting at the level of the organisation a more coherent and more congruent image about the elements that are important for the organisation, in the case of neutral identification the institutional levers that can determine an improvement of the identification feeling are very reduced.

Although we have built on Lockwood et al. (2002)'s idea that especially the Eastern societies (more collectivist) tend to manifest stronger and more independent self-constructs, focusing on themselves as part of a network of interpersonal relationships (Heine et al 1999) and thus, their members are more motivated to adapt to a group and to maintain social harmony, tending to focus on tasks and responsibilities towards others and to avoid behaviours leading to disruptions or to disappointing of significant people (Markus & Kitayama; 1991 Triandis 1989; Lockwood et al. 2002) the correlations the promoting organisational success/ preventing organisational failure (Lockwood et al. 2002) values registered with the assessed variables were modest.

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