

THE DYNAMICS OF ENROLLMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PETROȘANI OVER THE PAST DECADE IN THE EUROPEAN, NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT. *The paper studies the process of students' enrollment at the University of Petroșani, Romania, over the past decade and places its dynamics within a European, national and local context. On grounds of statistical data, the study aims at detecting the connection between the decreasing number of students at the University of Petroșani and a series of economic, social and political factors.*

KEY-WORDS: *enrollment, the education system, higher education, European, national, local, student migration.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *I25.*

1. THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

An article entitled 'How many Romanian Students Learn Abroad: 22,000, 35,000 or 50,000?'¹, reveals that the number of our high school graduates that choose to study outside the country grows with approximately 10% a year. Thus, if in 2005 there were 20,300 Romanian students abroad, their number grew constantly in the next two years, reaching 20,663 in 2006, and 21,451 in 2007, with a slight drop to 21,106 in 2008, followed by a more substantial growth to 21,902 in 2009, 22,179 in 2010, 23,052 in 2011, and 23,616 in 2012. What is really alarming in this context is that, at the same time, Romanian universities have been confronted with a growing void of students.

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¹ Our translation from the article 'Câți studenți români studiază în străinătate: 22.000, 35.000 sau 50.000?', published in *Ziarul Financiar*, on August 19, 2010

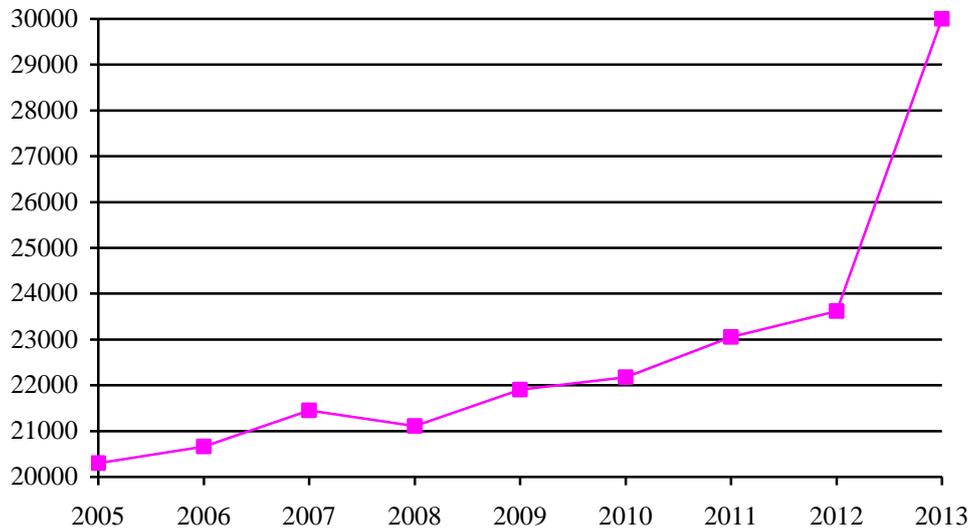


Figure 1. Dynamics of student migration over the past decade

The main reason why more and more Romanian students prefer to study in such countries as Great Britain, Germany, or the Nordic countries is their student-oriented educational systems, with emphasis on the practical aspects and possibilities of internship with prestigious companies. On the other hand, the 'Educativa Group', an organization that provides counseling services for Romanian high school graduates willing to enroll in a foreign university, reveals such economic reasons for this exodus as:

- the dramatic drop in annual tuition fees at foreign universities following Romania's integration in the EU in 2007 (from 8,500-15,000 EUR to 3,900 EUR in Great Britain, from 7,000-9,000 EUR to 1,600 EUR in Holland, from 5,000-10,000 EUR to 0-1,000 EUR in Germany, and from 9,000-12,000 EUR to 0 EUR in the Nordic countries²;
- the possibility to access governmental loans to cover all tuition costs, as in the case of Great Britain.

In an article dated August 2, 2013, and entitled 'Faculty Entrance Abroad: What are the Main Destinations of Romanian Students and Tuition Fees Outside the Country'³, Raluca Pantazi points out that foreign universities attracted 30,000 Romanian high school graduates in the respective year. Great Britain, Holland, Denmark and Sweden hold top positions on the list of preferences for such reasons as academic studies programs in English, low tuition fees and the British *Student Loans* governmental program.

² Source: www.educativa.ro, on grounds of statistical data from OECD and UNESCO

³ Our translation from 'Admiterea la facultate in strainatate: Care sunt principalele destinatii universitare ale studentilor romani si taxele de scolarizare la universitatile din afara', on HotNews.ro, August 2, 2013

A relevant fact is that almost 90% of the Romanian students in Great Britain benefit from these governmental loans to cover their taxes fully or partly. Moreover, some British universities provide scholarships or other financial support for Romanian students with limited income to help them cover their living expenses in their first months of residence in the country (the adjustment period). For instance, the article shows that the University of Bradford offers scholarships of up to 1,500, whereas others develop special programs meant both to support the payment of the tuition fees and to cover accommodation, living and travel expenses. A noteworthy example in this sense is the University of Essex, which granted 5,000 GBP to the students who opted for priority academic programs such as Art History, Public Health or Health Studies.

In Holland and Denmark, on the other hand, tuition fees are subsidized by the government, so that students from the E pay just 1.835 EUR annually, whereas in Denmark these taxes are fully subsidized.⁴

Another major reason why the Romanian high school graduates prefer to study abroad is that foreign universities have a high degree of insertion into the labor market upon graduation, as a result of internship programs. In Great Britain, for instance, there are the so-called 'sandwich' academic programs, which last four years instead of three, as they include one year of paid work experience. Similarly, Dutch universities have developed internship programs in different fields of study for students in Applied Sciences. Therefore, their graduates are more connected to the labor market realities and more career-oriented, generally being employed immediately upon graduation. Actually, Applied Sciences Universities in Holland provide a predominantly practical orientation with emphasis on economy and business, while in theoretical universities the curricula are focused on scientific research.⁵

Finally, an analysis developed by the World Education Fair reveals that the most popular fields of study with the 7,000 Romanian graduates recorded are Economy, Management and Marketing (40%), followed by IT and Computer Science (10%), the rest of the percentage being divided among International Relations, Law, Medical Studies, Tourism and other fields of social sciences and humanities.⁶

2. THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The national context of the dramatic drop in the number of Romanian students choosing to study in their own country is provided by the following factors:

The constant demographic decline after 1989. According to Vasile Ghețău, head of the Center of Demographic Research of the Romanian Academy, the Romanian population dropped from 23.2 mil inhabitants in 1990, to less than 20 mil in 2014. The specialist identifies natural decrease and massive migration, either permanent or temporary, as major reasons for the decline.⁷

Population aging. One major side effect of demographic decline is the decrease of young population (0-14 years) from 23.7% in 1990 to 15.0% in 2012 and

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Ibidem

⁶ Ibidem

⁷ Quoted by Mediafax on January 19, 2015

the increase of elderly population (65 and older) from 10.3% in 1990 to 15.00% in 2012.⁸ The constant aging of the Romanian population over the past decades has a long-term impact on the education system in terms of the number of pupils and students.

The declining economic situation of the country, culminating at the peak of the economic crisis in 2009-2010.

The poor funding of the education system on the whole, with a dramatic impact on the quality of the educational process, from specific facilities to human resources. Thus, between 2000-2010, Romania allocated an average of 3.25% of the GDP to education, whereas the average percentage of the GDP allocated to education by the EU countries in the same period was over 5%.⁹ One of the immediate consequences of poor funding was the decreasing subsidization of state higher education with such long-term economic effects as higher tuition fees and lower payment of faculty. In turn, this economic context generated social phenomena as school abandonment among students and the migration of faculty members either to other fields of activity, or to other countries.

The decreasing high school graduation rate is, alongside with school abandonment in pre-academic education, one of the leading causes of the increasing void of students which the Romanian universities have been confronted with over the past decade. In this sense, data provided by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research stand proof that the high school graduation rate decreased constantly between 2005-2014. As shown in the figure below, the high school graduation rate followed a slightly descending trend in the first four years of the decade, decreasing from 84.68% in 2005 to 80.48% in 2006, 82.08% in 2007, and 78.30% in 2008. The revival to 81.47% in 2009 was followed by a dramatic drop in the latter part of the decade, from 69.30% in 2010, to 45.73% in 2011, and 44.41% in 2012.¹⁰ Under the circumstances, the timid increase to 56.44% in 2013, although significant in comparison with the previous year, is not meant to be encouraging from the larger perspective of the whole decade. A noteworthy detail is that the lowest graduation rates were recorded after the introduction of surveillance cameras in the exam rooms in 2011. Under the circumstances, this situation is meant to draw attention to a much more serious and far-reaching issue than the decrease of the graduation rate as such, namely that the Romanian education system had been degrading for a long time, alongside with our whole system of values. To be more specific, in the eyes of the Romanian young generation, subject to inadequate raw models and exposed to the triumph of mediocrity, power is no longer associated with knowledge, professional merits and self-improvement, but with earning much money with minimal effort and the ability to *get round*.

⁸ 'Îmbătrânirea României. Câteva date, grafice și cifre', November 11, 2012, on HotNews

⁹ The Eurydice Report, 2013, p. 25

¹⁰ Source: www.edu.ro

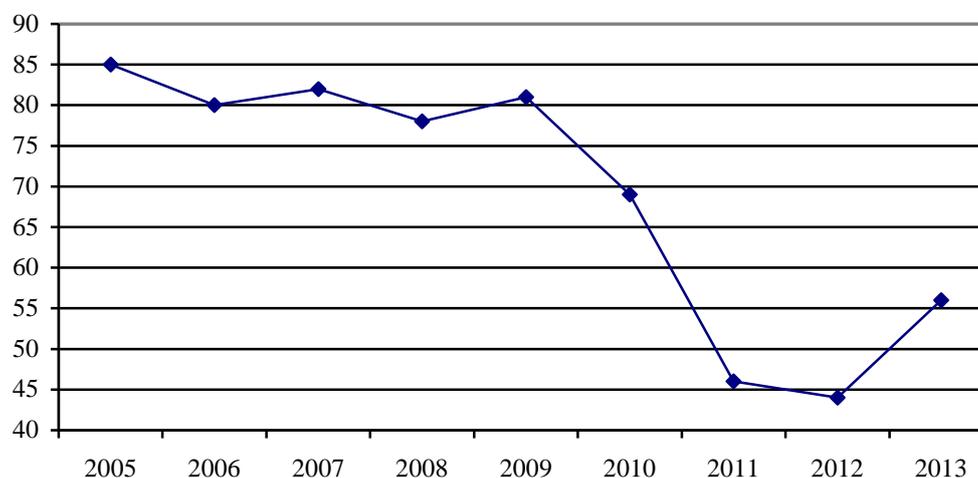


Figure 2. The evolution of high school graduation rate over he past decade

3. THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Since the majority of students at the University of Petroșani come from among the locals, the economic and social situation of the Jiu Valley represents a major factor that accounts for the phenomenon of decreasing enrollment. In the past two decades the Jiu Valley, like all the other mono-industrial areas in the country, has been affected by successive economic reforms, mainly under the form of personnel reductions. As Mihaela Camelia Schmidt and Felicia Andrioni pointed out in a research paper based on statistical data provided by the National Pit Coal Company (CNH), “ ... 19,796 persons, representing 43.9% of the total number of employees in the mining sector were laid off in 1997. In 2006, the number of employees in CNH was approximately 4 times smaller than in 1997. Reductions continued throughout the years, the most recent being the one in 2010, when, approximately 1,600 employees in mining were laid off”. (Schmidt & Andrioni, 2011, p.237)

As the authors show, as a result of successive restructurings, the number of employees decreased from 45,142 in 1997 to 11,795 in 2006, and to 8,745 in 2011.

These drastic economic measures had devastating social effects such as:

- **the surge of unemployment in the area**, since most of the active population was employed in the mining sector. In this sense, on January 1, 2011, there were 4,555 unemployed persons in the Jiu Valley, mostly males. (Schmidt & Andrioni, 2011, p. 239)¹¹ Although the unemployment rate decreased at the

¹¹ Source: The County Agency for Work Force Employment, Hunedoara - Statistics <http://www.ajofmhd.ro/>

beginning of 2010 to 10.15 % in Hunedoara county, the Jiu Valley preserves a higher level of unemployment, because it has “the fewest available jobs and the lowest investments in finding work force occupation alternatives in the county” (Schmidt, 2010, p.306).

- **the decrease of the local population**, mostly as a result of massive migration to other areas in the country or even abroad in search of jobs. The October 2011¹² census established a population decrease with 23,400 inhabitants in comparison with 2002, when 140,000 people lived in the area. In the Municipality of Petroșani alone, the 2011 census¹³ revealed a population decrease with approximately 10,000 people in comparison with 2001 (from 45,195 to 35,239 inhabitants). Taking into account that, according to Romanian legislation, urban areas with less than 40,000 inhabitants are to be downgraded from municipality to town, which entails a series of economic disadvantages, the destructive effects of restructuring in the long run become obvious. Moreover, the decrease of the urban population in the Jiu Valley with 27,000 inhabitants affects primarily the high schools in the area and, ultimately, the University in terms of enrollment.
- **the lowering of the living standards to the level of subsistence** due to poor material situation, which involves limited access to such basic needs as healthy food, decent living conditions, access to education and medical assistance.

4. THE DYNAMICS OF ENROLLMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PETROȘANI

The number of high school graduates who have accessed the educational offer of the University of Petroșani has varied substantially over the past decade, as a reflection of the changing European, national and local context.

The evolution of the number of students at the University of Petroșani beginning with academic year 2003-2004 is shown in table 1 and figure 3 students remains constant, as well as the significant increase of the number of post – graduate master students.

As table 1 and figure 3 show, the trend of enrollment was constantly ascending between 2004-2008 and reached its peak value in academic year 2009-2010, in spite of the European context after 2007, which stimulated student migration by tempting educational offers and accessible tuition fees. The figures reveal that the decrease in the number of enrolled candidates started in 2009-2010, coinciding with the beginning of the economic crisis and dropped dramatically in the next year, after the introduction of surveillance cameras in the high schools exam rooms. Unfortunately, the trend has been descending ever since, the end of the decade displaying a 50% decrease of the number of enrolled students.

¹² See: Corneliu Bran, 10.11.2011, www.zvj.ro/articole-376-Recent+incheiatul+recens++mant+arat+++c++++Valea+Jiului+a+ajuns+la+limita+sutei+de+mii+de+locuitori.html

¹³ See: Maximilian Gânju, April 20, 2015, www.avantulliber.ro/2015/04/20/populatia-judetului-scade-de-la-un-an-la-altul-2/

Table 1. Dynamics of enrollment in undergraduate studies between 2005-2014¹⁴

Academic year	No. of candidates enrolled
2005 - 2006	1,620
2006 - 2007	1,730
2007 - 2008	1,810
2008 - 2009	2,067
2009 - 2010	1,920
2010 - 2011	1,549
2011 - 2012	1,250
2012 - 2013	1,150
2013 - 2014	808

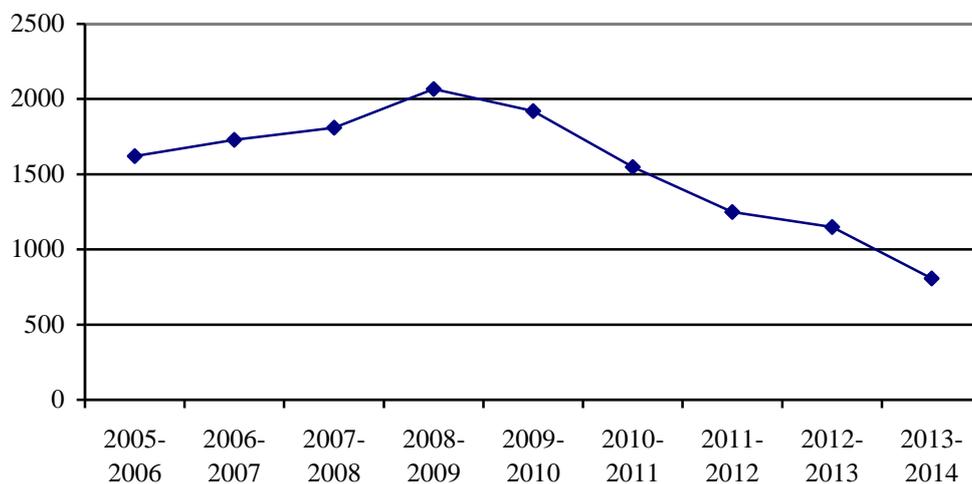


Figure 3. Dynamics of enrollment in undergraduate studies between 2005-2014

5. CONCLUSIONS

By corroborating the data provided by the European, the national and the local context, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the factors that had an impact on the dynamics of enrollment at the University of Petroșani over the past decade:

- the European context had the least impact on the number of students enrolled at our university because, given the financial possibilities of the vast majority of local families, very few high school graduates in the

¹⁴ Source: *The University of Petroșani. Self-evaluation Report 2003-2009; 2009-2014*

area could afford to study abroad. On the other hand, those with financial possibilities always have the option to study at a bigger or more prestigious university in the country;

- the national context had a huge negative impact from the perspective of the demographic decline, the marginalization of the education system by the government and the decrease in the number of high school graduates. Moreover, of the already small number of graduates, more and more choose either not to continue their studies, as it offers them no perspective of insertion into the Romanian labor market, or to study elsewhere in the country;
- the local actually underlies both of the above, because of the decline of the mining industry, with all its devastating economic and social consequences.

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