

# Higher Education in Centrally Planned Socialist System[s]: A European Experience Guest Editors' Foreword

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This issue of the *International Review of Social Research* presents selected papers presented at the international conference on *Higher Education in Socialist East-Central Europe: Economic Planning, Fields of Study, and Human Capital Formation*, held in Bucharest on November 15-16, 2013. The meeting was organized by the Center for Administrative, Cultural and Economic Studies in collaboration with the Faculty of History and of the Faculty of Administration and Business of the University of Bucharest. Some twenty researchers presented papers, foremost based on empirical studies, on different aspects of the higher education in the centrally planned European socialist [communist] systems which represented dominant macro and micro contexts of socio-

economic development in those countries after the Second World War.

Presented in this volume papers reflect main issues discussed at the conference such as:

- How close was the relationship between economic planning and the allocation of higher education study places in the various socialist [communist] countries? What were the main parameters considered by the political decision-makers and/ or technocratic planners?
- Did the system allow input from below? Which social groups and/or institutions were able to express a voice in the decision-making process? To which extant institutions of higher education were able to influence the allocation

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of resources?

- How do we measure the human capital formation inside the socialist [communist-type] societies? How did the population of higher education graduates evolve in different communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe? What was the wage differential between employees with secondary education and graduates of higher education? How did such wage differential vary in time?

A special mention is due to the paper presented by Robert Reisz, of West University Timisoara, in which he drew upon the existing scholarship and provided a broad overview of the problems of higher education, with a special attention to the former German Democratic Republic. Together with comments made by Jan Sadlak on the dominant characteristics of higher education under the communist regime, it provided a conceptual framework for comparative analyses between various in the region.

Turning to the presentation of papers included in this volume, we would like to begin with that of Bogdan Florian, who gave a blunt overview of the basic developments of Romanian higher education during the communist rule in order to arrive to a more general explanation of its evolution in the 1970s and 1980s, which he put in the context of the analytical framework developed by reformist Hungarian economist Janos Kornai. In his paper, Florian pointed out that in the supply-driven context of the central planning regime, the managers of overextended industries demanded (and persuaded the central planners to provide) more and more graduates with technical background, causing thus a major

imbalance in the structure of higher education. Not to mention substantial hardships in the adaptation of the Romanian society to realities of the forced industrialization.

Corina Doboş presents the way the increasing interest for demographical evolutions influenced the way intellectuals and political decision-makers conceived the role of higher education and its relationship with the general economic development of the Romanian society in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Lazăr Vlăsceanu and Marian-Gabriel Hăncean adress the same imbalance in favor of technical higher education, combining quantitative analyses and regressions with qualitative insights based on individual life-stories, which highlight the disfunctions of the manpower planning system in Romania, especially in the 1970s and 1980s.

The section *Policies, Procedures and Institutions Providing/Restricting Access to Higher Education* combines attempts to provide general reconstruction of the way the planning system functioned in Romania and in the Soviet Ukraine over large time-spans. In this regard particularly revealing are the analyses presented in papers of Vlad Paşca and Sergiy Kurbatov.

Because of conflicting interpretations of geopolitical and internal reality, the analysis concerning higher education in the ex-Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has some peculiarities. The complexity of functioning of higher education has been demonstrated in the paper of Nikola Baketa, focused on the two leading universities, that of Belgrade and Zagreb.

Igor Czernecki addresses the case of the Ford Foundation furthering the post-graduate formation in Polish higher education in the late 1950s and early 1960s, while Valentin Maier reconstructs the growth and subsequent downsizing of artistic higher education in communist Romania.

Particularly revealing is the case study undertaken by Matei Gheboianu on the severe cuts in study places decided by the Ceaușescu regime in 1982. The archival sources preserved reveal the inconsistencies of the communist planning system, the significant fluctuations of the figures of graduates demanded by the economic ministries, and the lack of transparent debates, even inside the small circle of informed decision-makers and central planners.

Finally, a set of three papers address the issue of how the higher education graduates were integrated into socialist enterprises and/or institutions. Marius Traian Cazan deals with the first phases of centrally planned compulsory assignment (repartition) of higher education graduates, reveals the loopholes which allowed for individual agency from below, as well as their gradual elimination through bureaucratic measures, which became effective in the context of an increasing supply of higher education

graduates. Focusing on the repartition of the graduates of the University of Bucharest in the 1980s, Mirela Rotaru highlights the impact of the closure of big cities decided by the regime in 1981, while Valentin Vasile focuses on the problematic experience of higher education graduates assigned to the flagship of communist industry, the '23 August' factory in Bucharest.

It is our hope that the papers presented in this volume, while drawing on extensive use of historical sources and statistical data, will provide valuable insights for the better understanding and conceptual analysis of the wasteful and overall negative consequences of policies on higher education, despite rationalistic claims and elaborated theories of dominant doctrine which determined interaction between higher education and society under regime of centrally planned socialist [communist] system[s].

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