

Job Assignment of Graduates of the University of Bucharest and Their Integration in the Labor System of the 1980s

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Abstract: According to the official communist rhetoric, the assignment of higher education graduates to socialist enterprises and/or institutions was ‘an action with profound social-political meanings, which aims to ensure the production units and other areas which the specialists they need’. The closure of the top most populated 14 cities starting with 1981 combined with the economic crisis of the 1980s and with various measures of the regime perceived as absurd, and made the system more restrictive than ever before. This study focuses on the changes of the job supply for graduates of the University of Bucharest during the 1980s, and on the process of assigning graduates to their work-place.

Keywords: *assignment, graduates, production, planned economy, 1980s.*

The University of Bucharest, similar to the entire Romanian education system, was subject to communist experimental policies, which reflected quite accurately the general development of the political system in Romania in the 1980s. Of the numerous aspects related to academic activities, the assignment of graduates to the labor system, which the documents of the time considered ‘an action of deep social and political significance’, witnessed important developments in the 1980s. This generated actual ‘phenomena’ inside the Romanian society.

The graduates of the University of Bucharest were assigned to the labor system (‘assignment’, as it was called back then) based on a process which, including in the 1980s, was regulated by the provisions of Decree no. 54 of 1975. According to this decree, the criterion for the assignment of graduates was their graduation rating, which was ‘established taking into account their academic performance, in compliance with the standards on position assignment in the branch or sector to which the socialist unit belongs’ (Archives of the Law School of the University of Bucharest,

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Secretariat Records, Assignments). The graduate students with the highest score could choose any job from those made available to their class. Graduates who requested positions in rural regions, in the communes where they, their parents or spouses lived, or in the neighboring communes, received priority irrespective of their graduation ranking. Graduates who would request assignment to working centers or towns where they, their parents or spouses lived, except for large cities, as referred to by law, received priority in the process of filling out positions in those localities or neighboring communes, provided they had at least grade seven. In the case of graduates with identical ranking, those who were married were the priority, and if more married graduates had obtained the same grades, the ones with children were given priority, followed by those whose spouses were employed by a socialist enterprise based in the respective locality. Another category of priority consisted of married graduates of the same graduation class and specialization, who were assigned according to the highest graduation ranking of the two spouses. Article four, letter h) of the above-mentioned Decree provided for an additional half point (0.50) taken into account for assignment purposes in the case of graduates with significant activities in the community and good behavior during the study years, as appreciated by the faculty board. Graduates who did not pass the diploma examination were assigned to the labor system after those who had.

The evolution of higher education in Romania in the 1980s, in addition to a significant focus shift of university

teaching towards technical and engineering education (according to Jan Sadlak, ‘no other European country had seen such a shift [of the university teaching focus center]’) (Jan Sadlak, 1990: 60; Murgescu, 2010: 385-386), brought about severe changes to the job allocation dynamics, in respect of the assignment of graduates of the University of Bucharest. Thus, Decree no. 367/December 4th, 1980, of the Romanian State Council introduced measures for ‘the rational use of personnel in socialist units’. According to the first article ‘ministries, other central bodies and executive committees of popular county councils and Bucharest Municipality, along with the units subordinated thereto shall take measures to ensure that activities are implemented with the smallest possible number of administrative staff’ (Archives of the Bucharest University Rectorate, Secretariat, Register no. 2857/1980). The next articles of the same decree provided for the freezing of vacancies on December 1st, 1980, and of those positions which were to become vacant as a result of retirement, transfers etc. between December 1st, 1980 and December 1st, 1981; the categories of staff affected by the provisions of the decree; and the exceptions to the same provisions. It is worth mentioning that the annex which included the positions which were not to be frozen was considered a ‘professional secret’, and was subject to a specific regime. Article four of the decree referred explicitly to *the teaching activity in education establishments of all levels which will be delivered by the existing personnel in the interval December 1st, 1980 – September 1st,*

1981, with the vacant positions to be frozen. New teaching staff could be employed by the respective categories of establishments, according to the law, only at the beginning of the school year 1981 – 1982. During the same time interval, the personnel of ministries, other central bodies and bodies of the central and local government could not benefit from promotion. The provisions of this decree most directly influenced the allocation of positions for the purpose of assigning to the labor system the graduates of the University of Bucharest and other universities in the country.

The ‘Methodological clarifications on how higher education graduates – daytime classes, class 1980, were distributed to the labor system’ (Archives of the Bucharest University Rectorate, Secretariat, Register no. 2821/1980), as submitted in June 1980 to the rector’s office of the University of Bucharest by the Ministry of Education, very specifically described the implementation of the graduates’ assignment activity, step by step. The general provisions of the Clarifications referred to ‘prioritizing the supply of staff to cover for the needs of counties and areas facing shortage of highly educated experts’. In order to ensure the stability of staff in those areas, the management of faculties and higher education institutions, the Union of Communist Students Associations (USA) and the Communist Students Association (CSA), guided by party organizations, had to develop activities aimed at convincing graduates to choose positions in their localities of residence. The government committee in charge with coordinating the assignment of higher education graduates had

to make sure that the assignment process complied with the provisions of the law and of the presidential decree on the numerical assignment of graduates of higher education institutions – daytime courses – class 1980. The committee was headed by the minister of education and consisted of representatives of the State Planning Committee, the Labor Ministry, the UASCR Board and other ministries and bodies with a coordinating role in the branch. The nominal assignment of graduates required the setting up, with the government committee’s approval, of committees for each area of specialization, which were headed by deputy ministers or deputy heads of other central bodies with a coordinating role in the branch. These committees reviewed and submitted to the government committee the lists of jobs by units and localities made available to graduates, and undertook the nominal assignment of graduates to the respective positions. The allocation process was conducted as follows: for specializations in which graduates came from more university centers, the allocation was conducted centrally, through the communicational system, with the committees set up by areas of specialization comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education as secretaries, as well as representatives of other ministries, central bodies and executive committees of popular county councils as members, alongside vice-rectors of the higher education establishments for the respective graduates. For specializations for which graduates were provided by a single university center, the allocation process was conducted at the university

headquarters and section, on the dates set by the heads of the committees set up for each area of specialization.

Sub-committees were established at the level of faculties for allocation by specializations. They were subordinated to the committees set by areas of specialization, with the following constituency: the dean or his/her deputy (chairman), two or three professors, the CSA representative, other representatives of economic ministries, interested central bodies or executive committees of popular councils (members), as applicable. The instructions for the allocation of graduates to the labor system were issued by these sub-committees in charge with the assignment process, which implemented them according to a set of standard forms provided by the Ministry of Education and signed by the sub-committee's chairman and secretary. The original documents were handed to graduates; in the case of graduates distributed to the higher education system, scientific research, technological engineering or design, the instructions mentioned the name of the institution and the labor unit where graduates were to work for the first two years of internship. The calendar of the activities related to graduates' assignment was established by the government committee in charge, by profiles and specializations. For specializations where assignment was conducted centrally, the faculty board together with the heads of communist students' associations had to supply, within at least seven days before the assignment process, all the documents needed for the good performance of the graduates' assignment activity. The lists containing the country-

wide classification of graduates were prepared by the committees set up by areas of specialization, and were disseminated to all faculties which had to display those lists at least three days ahead of the assignment process (Archives of the Bucharest University Rectorate, Secretariat, Register no. 2821/1980). The lists containing the positions available to graduates, as communicated by the committees set up by areas of specialization, had to be displayed at least five days before the graduates' allocation to the labor system. The order in which graduates appeared before the committees in charge with the assignment was established as follows: graduates with the highest ranking in their class originating from different academic centers were the first to be distributed, according to their respective grades; if they had the same academic score, the ones who requested the position closer to their residence were given priority. In identical cases, the alphabetic order was followed. The next were the graduates who requested to be assigned to a position in their place of residence, taking into account the priorities and, eventually, the rest of the graduates were distributed in the strict order of their graduation scores, irrespective of their birthplace. Graduates of the fifth year, which was the specialization year, were included on separate lists, and distributed before those who did not follow the specialization.

Within each category of graduates, among those who had the same score, the first to be assigned a job were those who were married, and if more graduates with the same score were married, those with children would come first, followed by those whose

spouse was employed by a socialist unit located in the respective town/locality. If two graduates of the same class were married, their assignment considered the highest score of one of the spouses; the spouses of graduates with the highest ranks in their class were distributed immediately after the graduates with the highest rank in the respective class. Graduates who did not show up for job assignment, or refused their jobs, were received a job by default, upon proposals made by the faculty sub-committee. In rare cases, there were ‘agreements’ or ‘negotiations’ among colleagues for positions that were beneficial to some or the other of the candidates, from the family perspective.

The centralized allocation of jobs involving the communicational system was dropped starting with the 1985 academic, when graduates were assigned to jobs based on individual lists of positions available to each higher education establishment. In the previous period, between 1970 and 1985, the allocation of jobs was centralized for the entire country, all graduates being invited to one of the academic centers.

The consequences generated by the application of Decree no. 367 of September 4th, 1980 became truly visible starting with the job assignment process for the graduates of the 1981 academic year. Previously, the higher education graduates resident in the 14 large cities identified in Decree no. 54/1975 were given priority in occupying 70 per cent of the total number of positions available in those large cities (Archives of the Bucharest University Rectorate, Secretariat, Register no. 2821/1980) provided their

score was at least eight. After 1981, the situation changed, and these 14 cities became completely closed to higher education graduates.

In what follows I will try to identify the changes in the economic and geographic configuration of jobs made available to graduates of the University of Bucharest in the early and middle years of the 1980 decade. The benchmarks used will be two of the most important faculties of the University of Bucharest, namely Law and Mathematics. I will make a comparative analysis of the years 1977, 1981 and 1985 for the Law School, and of the years 1980 and 1981 for Mathematics. To put things into perspective, we have to mention that, during the years under study, graduates of the Law School from Bucharest accounted for 45 per cent of the total Law graduates in Romania, while 43 per cent of the total number of graduates of Mathematics was provided by the University of Bucharest.

In the summer of 1977, 141 graduates of the Law School of the University of Bucharest were assigned jobs in the labor system. Out of the 141 positions allocated to graduates, 31 were in large cities (12 in Bucharest; four in Ploiești; six in Craiova; two in Brăila; three in Pitești; and one position in each of the following: Galați, Timișoara, Arad, Constanța, accounting for approximately 21 per cent of the number of positions); 48 graduates were assigned jobs in county capital cities (municipalities), other than the 14 large cities, these positions accounting for approximately 34 per cent. Other 37 graduates were assigned jobs in urban areas, i.e. approximately 26 per cent of the total positions; 25

graduates were sent to rural regions, approximately 19 per cent of positions. Considering the large economic sectors, 60 positions were offered in industrial enterprises, 41 in the legal sector (lawyers, judges, prosecutors and notaries), 30 in the farming sector, to communist CAPs and IASs (farming cooperatives and state-owned farming enterprises), and 10 positions in the transport industries (road and water-land), postal and telecommunications services and trade; 51 graduates were assigned to their places of residence or the neighboring areas from the same county, which accounted for approximately 36 per cent of the graduates' number (Archives of the Law School of the University of Bucharest, Secretariat Records, Assignments, collected data).

The job configuration in the assignment of graduates emanating from the Law School of the University of Bucharest changed dramatically in the summer of 1981. 174 students from two specializations graduated the Law School that summer: 124 graduates of Legal Science: Law, and 50 graduates of Legal Science: Economic and Administrative Law. Jobs in large cities were no longer available to Law graduates. For graduates of Legal Science/Law, out of the 124 available positions, only 43 were in county capital cities, other than the first 14 large cities; these accounted for approximately 34 per cent of the total number of positions. Other 36 graduates were assigned to urban regions and accounted for approximately 29 per cent of the total number of positions; 45 graduates were sent to rural regions, accounting for approximately 36 per cent of the positions. Law graduates

majoring in Legal Science/Economic and Administrative Law were assigned to 50 positions, out of which 30 in county capital cities which accounted for 60 per cent; six graduates were assigned jobs in urban areas, i.e. 12 per cent of the number of available positions, with other 14 sent to rural areas, which represented 28 per cent of the available jobs.

A breakdown of this situation on the main economic sectors reveals that the jobs allocated to Law graduates of the 1981 class were structured as follows: for Legal Science/Law, 36 jobs were in industrial enterprises and factories, accounting for 29 per cent of the total number of positions; 45 positions accounting for 37 per cent of the jobs were provided by the Ministry of Justice and the General Prosecutor's Office (lawyers, prosecutors, judges); 31 jobs were provided by CAPs and IASs (farming cooperatives and state-owned farming enterprises) in agriculture, i.e. 26 per cent; the remaining 12 positions, which accounted for nine point six per cent of the total, were provided by town councils and commercial enterprises. 53 graduates, i.e. 42 per cent (Archives of the Law School of the University of Bucharest, Secretariat Records, Assignments, collected data), were assigned to positions in their places of residence or in the neighboring areas from the same county.

To graduates of Legal Science/Economic and Administrative Law of the 1981 class, 19 positions were allocated in the industrial sector, accounting for 38 per cent of the total number of positions, with the remaining 31, i.e. 62 per cent, provided by local councils; 17 graduates (34 per cent)

were sent to their places of residence or the neighboring areas from the same county.

In the mid-1980s, the situation of job allocation for Law School graduates far from positive. Large cities continued to be inaccessible to university graduates. In the summer of 1985, 150 students graduated the Law School of the University of Bucharest, out of which 118 majored in Law, and 32 in Economic and Administrative Law. 31 positions were accessible to Law graduates in county capital cities, other than the major large cities, which accounted for around 26 per cent of the total number of positions. Other 70 graduates were assigned jobs in the urban area, which represented 59 per cent of the positions. The class of 1985 received 17 positions in the rural area, which accounted for 15 per cent of the total number of jobs. Only six positions were opened to graduates of Economic and Administrative Law in county capital cities, accounting for approximately 18 per cent of total positions. Other four positions (accounting for 12 per cent of the total positions) were available in the urban area. The remaining 22 positions, i.e. 70 per cent of their total number, were available in rural regions. The structure of positions broken down on the main economic sectors was as follows: for the Law specialization, 32 positions were provided in industry, accounting for approximately 26 per cent of the number of positions. In the legal sector, the Ministry of Justice and the General Prosecutor's Office provided 53 positions (around 44 per cent of the total number of positions allocated to graduates in 1985). The remaining 33 positions were provided

in agriculture, in farming cooperatives and state-owned farming enterprises (CAPs and IASs), trade, transport and local councils. For Economic and Administrative Law, the vast majority of jobs (31 of 32) were offered by local councils.

In 1985, out of the 150 graduates of the Law School of the University of Bucharest, only 44 (approximately 29 per cent) were assigned jobs in their places of residence or the neighboring areas from the same county.

In the 1980s, the job pattern dynamics for the Mathematics Faculty of the University of Bucharest was influenced by the same political and legal reality as was the case with the Law School. However, the specific pattern was, naturally, very different. In June 1980, 145 graduates of the Mathematics Faculty were integrated in the labor system. 109 (i.e. 75 per cent) were assigned jobs in the pre-academic education sector, in high schools and gymnasiums. Out of the total 145 positions allocated to the 1980 graduates, 47 positions (approximately 32 per cent) were in the major 14 large cities identified by Decree no. 54/1975 (Bucharest: 32; Constanța: one; Brăila: four; Ploiești: three; Galați: four; Oradea: two; Iași: one). In county capital cities, other than the above-mentioned 14, 15 other positions were available, with other 35 graduates sent to the urban area. Overall, out of the 145 positions allocated to Mathematics graduates in 1980, 97 were in urban regions (accounting for approximately 66 per cent of the total positions), with 34 per cent in jobs provided in rural areas. Out of the 36 positions provided in other sectors than the pre-academic education sector, the large

majority was offered to graduates of the Information Technology Section in computation centers within ministries or industrial factories.

Out of the 145 graduates of the Mathematics Faculty of the University of Bucharest, class of 1980, only 34 (approximately 23 per cent) were assigned to their places of residence the neighboring areas from the same counties (Archives of the Mathematics Faculty of the University of Bucharest, Secretariat Records, Register no. I-III/1976).

In June 1981, the positions made available to these graduates displayed a completely different structure as compared to the previous year. The first obvious change came from the fact that the major 14 large cities completely disappeared from the lists of positions allocated to graduates. In 1981, 144 graduates were integrated in the labor system. Out of this number, 106, accounting for approximately 73 per cent of the total number of 1981 graduates, were assigned to the pre-academic education sector; 30 graduates were sent to county capital cities to cover around 20 per cent of the allocated positions. Oradea, one of the 14 large cities, provided two positions, one meant for graduates of the Information Technology Section with the Central Institute for management and informatics, and the other meant for Mathematics graduates, with the Oradea Constructions Trust. The other large cities were not included on the lists of available jobs. 37 graduates were assigned jobs in the urban area (approximately 25 per cent of total number of graduates). Out of the total 144 graduates, around 47 per cent were assigned to the urban area.

One can notice a significantly higher share of positions in the rural area for Mathematics graduates as compared to the previous year, namely 53 per cent in 1981 as opposed to 34 per cent in 1980. In respect of graduates assigned jobs in other sectors than pre-academic education, 27 positions were in industrial companies or transport and construction trusts, particularly allocated to graduates of the Information Technology Section, the remaining positions being provided by Central Institutes for management and informatics, local councils and county branches of the Savings Bank (CEC).

Out of the 144 graduates of the Mathematics Faculty of the University of Bucharest in 1980, only 37 (approximately 25 per cent) were assigned jobs in their places of residence of the neighboring areas from the same counties (Archives of the Mathematics Faculty of the University of Bucharest, Secretariat Records, Register no. I-II/1977).

In mid-1980s, for the class which graduated Mathematics in 1985, the structure of positions revealed significant changes. First of all, for graduates of the fifth year, which was the specialization year, there was a double assignment. Out of the total 134 graduates, 14 graduated the fifth year and benefited from a double assignment. In the first stage, all graduates with double assignment were distributed to pre-academic education, while a second assignment considered research and design institutes. Most positions in the research area, eight out of 14, were provided by the Bucharest Institute of scientific research and technological engineering for aviation. For the remaining 120 graduates, the

major cities continued to be completely inaccessible. There was a slight decline in the share of positions in pre-academic education, to the benefit of assignments in the industrial area. County or city councils did not provide any positions to 1985 graduates. 95 of the graduates were assigned to pre-academic education, accounting for about 70 per cent of the 1985 graduates. 34 graduates were assigned to county capital cities, accounting for 25 per cent of the graduates. 41 more graduates were assigned to urban area, i.e. about 30 per cent of the positions. Out of the total 120 graduates with no specialization year, 75 were assigned to the urban area, accounting for 55 per cent of the total positions allocated to the class of 1985. In 1985, 48 Mathematics graduates, accounting for 40 per cent of the total number, were assigned to rural area, a slightly smaller percentage than in 1981. In respect of graduates assigned to other areas than pre-academic education, it is worth mentioning that 22 positions were in industrial enterprises, chemical companies or transport and construction companies, especially for graduates of the Information Technology Section, the remaining positions being in Central Institutes for Management and Informatics.

Conclusions

A few conclusions may be drawn at this stage of our research. In the 1980s, the process which assigned the graduates of the University of Bucharest to the labor system underwent important changes, in respect of specific assignment mechanisms (the tele-speaker centralized

arrangements in 1980-1985), as well as the geographic and economic configuration of positions allocated to university graduates. The fact that the major 14 cities were inaccessible to graduates in 1980 resulted in a sharp increase of the share of positions provided to graduates of the University of Bucharest in rural regions, at least as proven by the two faculties under study. Another aspect worth indicating is the very low number of graduates distributed to their places of residence or the neighboring areas from the same county. The impact of these changes on Romanian society consisted, on one hand, in the emergence of migrant families (with spouses working in different localities), and, on the other hand, in the phenomenon of commuting intellectual work force, particularly manifest in the neighboring areas of large cities inaccessible to university graduates in the 1980s. By frustrating the aspirations of higher education graduates to find jobs in large cities immediately after graduation, and by forcing upon them (theoretically, at least) three years of compulsory service in towns and/or villages, Ceaușescu's regime fuelled the dissatisfaction and resentment of young intellectuals, and thus contributed to the increasing drift between political leadership and the Romanian social and cultural elites.

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