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Models of research administration. A Romanian case study

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Abstract

Our paper's aim is to describe and assess a Romanian model of university research administration. There are many approaches in the field of research management and many success examples. In the last few years Romanian public and private universities had to compete for a quite small public research and innovation budget in the context of economic crisis. Moreover the quality insurance authority asked more and more proofs that the Romanian academic world is dedicated to research and innovation activities as well as teaching ones. In this spirit the high education institutions had to develop new internal tools and mechanisms of managing the research activities to respond both to quality criteria and financing needs.

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1. Introduction

The university as a concept changed little during the ages. The main purpose remained the same: research and education. From the *Constitutio Habita* to the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, the research and education community is dedicated to freedom of knowledge and teaching. Only the institutional framework suffered changes. The research and education methodology also adapted to last technologies and scientific approaches, but the spirit of the first high education establishments endured over time.

Beside the technological adaptation of these activities, another important change was the elitist approach. Nowadays everyone is welcome to study to the latest high-standard research results. This new open approach for university learning claimed for public authority involvement to cover the need of high education. As a result, public universities were created and financially supported by the government. Although the university education is not compulsory, the public subsidies finance it. We are not going to develop here the financing criteria and principles in Romania. The problem of how the public subsidy does not follow the individual, as it could be reasonable, for he is the contributor as a taxpayer, but goes to the public education institution “no matter what”, will be approached separately in other paper.

The issue related to the financing “no matter what” extends to the part of the budgetary subsidies going to the public universities and being distributed for research purposes (current activities and material investments). This

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approach is not beneficial for the high education and research system as a whole, as some authors consider that all research activities should be the subject of quantity and quality evaluation – mainly peer review or bibliometric methods (Groot, Valderrama, 2006).

2. University research management case study

All the public universities in Romania receive public funding for developing research activities and investments for research infrastructure on a common basis. Beside it there is a national financing framework for competitions available for all public and private universities.

Our assessment is based on a private university case study. The main issue in organizing the research management in such institution is the competitive disadvantage given by the fact that the public counterparts in the education system benefit from the government financing resources. This pose the problem of an even more efficient approach based not only on managing the resources but also seeking it and ensuring the procedures for the best allocation and outcomes.

2.1. Correlation model

For our assessment we used data regarding the research financing at the national level and the share of it in the university research budget.

The independent variable is the national research budgetary allocation and as a dependent variable the university research income for the same interval. The premise for starters is that the university research finance resources are strictly related to the national potential.

Table 1. Correlation tables

SUMMARY OUTPUT

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.150809012
R Square	0.022743358
Adjusted R Square	-0.465884963
Standard Error	53821.76446
Observations	4

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	1.35E+08	1.35E+08	0.046545	0.849190988
Residual	2	5.79E+09	2.9E+09		
Total	3	5.93E+09			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	3613.745951	286720.8	0.012604	0.991088	-1230046.483	1237274	-1230046	1237274
2700	23.77093015	110.1814	0.215744	0.849191	-450.3012754	497.8431	-450.301	497.8431

The correlation assessment conclusions are that because R^2 is 0.15 – very close to 0 – we can consider that the regression model does not explain the connection between the two variables (moreover only 15.08% of the dependent variable – university research income – is explained by the independent variable – national research budget – variation. Also given the fact that Sig in the F test is 0.84 – bigger than 0.05 – the linear relation between the two variables is not significant.

The assessment shows that the correlation between the total national research budget and the research income of the university. Our conclusion is that not the insufficiency of financing available on the research market was the cause of the lack of research funds but the inconsistency of research management process at the university level. Moreover the research management is a qualitative variable and it can be described by quantitative variables as the research activity yearly income.

Given these facts the university top management decided to reorganize the research management units and empower these units for creating better access to research finance sources and have a wider possibility of information. The direct beneficiaries of this should be the university human resource – lecturers, researchers and administrative personnel.

Figure 1. Research management units



The two direct research management structures: the research management office and the projects management office were created separately one from each other so other projects than research ones (development) can take the attention needed also. These operative units have not only a passive role of informing the researchers in the university but also an active role in tutoring and counseling all the human resource involved in the research activity. By the meaning of these operative units the researchers not only gain in information and implementation know-how but also gain time to devote for teaching and research being relieved of some administrative activities.

Although these research management units are only administrative tools at the hand of the university top management the benefits of their activity can be similar to the research center organized processes. It can also stimulate institutional cooperation and affiliation improving the research activity results increasing the volume of research time (Boardman & Corley, 2008).

Beside the two management units, we have the research departments which practically develop research activities and implement research projects using the university human resources and infrastructure.

The operative management activity is based on the operative regulations and the research activity procedures. According to it the research activity and its management consist in assuming a sum of responsibilities and coordination relations.

3. Conclusion

The conclusion regarding the national research system as a whole is that at the present time creates disparities and asymmetries between the public and the private universities financing only a part of them – the public ones – and doing it without using an adequate performance evaluation method or general criteria. This fact creates frustration and impossibility of comparison between the two parts of the national research and education system.

Secondly, the conclusion regarding the university action in the context presented above is that without a strong institutional mechanism of management is doomed to have poor performances in attracting financing resources and having research results. The efforts have been made in this matter and the results should confirm the expectation.

The econometric assessment developed shows that the lack of a comprehensible management tool the research activity is immune to the national budgetary fluctuation, meaning that no matter how much the contracting authority can offer for developing research projects the university cannot adapt its demands. The inelasticity of demand it can be consider a function of management in the matter of research activity.

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