

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION**

Doctoral School of Administrative Sciences

**EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION WITH
IMPACT ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN ROMANIA**

(SUMMARY)

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR

Prof. Univ. Dr. Ani MATEI

PhD

Gabriela ȘERBU

BUCHAREST

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SUMMARY

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*" We live in a world where soon
there will be no room but for innovation"
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II. INTRODUCTION REGARDING GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

The evolution of today's society, in general, the context of social relations and the transformations Romanian society is going through, led me to the option of carrying out, as part of my doctoral studies, an in-depth research that would highlight the influence of social innovation on the educational environment in Romania.

Starting from this idea and, through the sphere of current concerns, I realized, within the doctoral school at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest, under the excellent guidance of Prof. Univ. Dr. Ani Matei, doctoral thesis with the title *"Educational policies and strategies for social innovation with impact on university education in Romania"*.

The architecture of the thesis is made up of eight chapters, the last of which, respectively, chapter VIII is dedicated to the conclusions, the identified, open problems and the mention of the perspectives outlined as a result of the research carried out within the thesis.

Thus, each chapter was created in such a way as to illustrate a certain part of the thesis, resulting, through the convergence of the 8 chapters, a clear picture of the generous theme, from the title of the thesis: *"Educational policies and strategies for social innovation with impact on university education in Romania"*.

The brief description of the content of each chapter in the thesis is reproduced below, as follows:

Chapter I - Introduction: In this chapter, a theoretical "incursion" was made in the specialized literature on educational strategies and policies, but also in the theoretical context of social innovation. Last but not least, in this chapter, concrete elements were exposed regarding the interaction between social innovation and education (I.4) or the interaction between social innovation - educational policies and strategies (I.5).

By composing this chapter, a broad exposition of what I was going to achieve in the doctoral thesis was pursued, both through the in-depth theoretical study of educational policies and strategies, of social innovation, as well as through the detailed research on the access of people

with disabilities in university study programs. At the same time, in this chapter, the essential aspects of the research, the objectives and the research methodology were presented synthetically.

Chapter II: Educational policies. In this chapter, as in the following 5 chapters, the concepts presented synthetically in chapter I were detailed. Thus, within the chapter. II, the dynamics of the implementation process of strategies and public policies in education were exposed, but especially in the context of the educational system in Romania (II.1). In the second part of the chapter (II.2), the process of implementing public policies in the field of university education in Romania was described.

The chapter also has a part of conclusions on the two parts addressed.

Chapter III: Social innovation in the public sector. What does social innovation mean in the public domain? What arguments and models can be applied in the context of innovation in the public domain? All these aspects were treated in detail, in chapter III of the work (III.1, III.2). Several models of social innovation were presented in subchapter III.1.

And for this chapter, conclusions were drawn (III.3) to illustrate the importance of social innovation in the public sector.

Chapter IV- Innovation in education. It deals with the issue of innovation in university education with innovation factors, barriers to innovation (external, internal, legal), leaders of the innovation process, measurement of innovation, interaction in innovation, results of educational policies applied in the pandemic. This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the main aspects regarding innovation in university education, this concept being one of the fundamental references of the paper. Last but not least, in the same chapter IV, the need to establish a culture, openness and freedom - a driver of innovation in university education institutions - was presented. Innovation as an essential factor of development, in the context of the fulminant developments of the current society, implies an efficient and effective management of the innovation process, without which the approach itself would have random positive results but irrelevant for the institutional development and society in general.

Subchapter IV.4 deals with the main measures, appreciated as innovative actions, taken in the community space, especially during the pandemic, with the aim of keeping the educational processes in operation at the university level.

Chapter V - Models of the innovation process. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the innovation process. In this chapter, the different models of the existing innovation process were presented,

including the "*triple helix*" social innovation model that was a starting point for the research presented in the sixth chapter.

Among the models studied, the most relevant, for the research carried out and presented in **chapter VII**, is the model of the *triple helix/tripartite approach*, in which the main theme is that the university goes into the future as the predominant organizational format of a knowledge-based society. Because innovation is a broader process than any one institutional sphere or national style, the interaction between the institutional spheres of university, industry, and government (playing both their traditional roles) and others in various combinations becomes the basis of society's creativity. The resulting triple propeller is a new global innovation system.

Regarding the models used in the innovation process, presented in chapter V of the work, it can be concluded that we have passed from an era based on the assumption that research is automatically translated into use, to an era in which policies are reinvented continuously to achieve this goal.

Chapter VI: Educational change through the implementation of the concept of social innovation. This chapter presents the development of an integrated model of social innovation that can be applied in conditions where radical educational changes are pursued, changes that must be accompanied by packages of measures implemented through coherent educational policies and strategies. Thus, educational change is considered through the implementation of the concept of social innovation. The process of educational change is complex in the context of social changes in the last decade, where disruptive radical transformations encompass all societal domains.

Chapter VII: Model of social innovation in Romanian higher education with impact on people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Special case: disabled people. I appreciate that the most important chapter in the work is chapter VII because it coagulates the part of the research carried out, based on the data obtained by surveying several institutions and some well-defined target groups within the stages of the research with the theoretical and conceptual aspects presented in the other chapters.

Analyzing the categories of vulnerable groups/persons, in terms of the existence of strategies, action plans, public policies, etc.; the existence of the data over a reasonable period of time; the existence of concrete measures to support vulnerable people for access to higher education, the result was that, from the five categories of people from disadvantaged backgrounds

analyzed, a relevant research theme can be focused on identifying the elements of a public policy regarding the access of people with disabilities in the cycle of undergraduate university studies.

Starting from these considerations, within the work, the necessary study was undertaken regarding: 1) the accurate identification of the target group and their problems regarding access to higher education, 2) the identification of opportunities to improve access to higher education for this category socio-economically disadvantaged and 3) identifying the elements of public educational policy that meet the needs of this category regarding the access of people with disabilities to higher education.

In this case, the research hypothesis refers to improving the access of young people with disabilities to university education, to the study programs offered by this educational environment. In the research, the quantitative method was mostly used, based on the numerical collection of data with the help of questionnaires and their statistical processing. The main instrument of the research is the questionnaire, the answer options being structured, for the most part, on the basis of the Likert¹ scale. The analysis of the statistical data collected following the application of the questionnaires to the 6572 applicants was carried out with the surveymonkey² software.

From the study carried out, it follows that solving the problems of people with disabilities is done through the interaction of three main actors: *government and subordinate institutions - professional associations/ NGOs - universities (higher education institutions)*. In this context, a suitable model of social innovation was appreciated in the research, as that of the triple helix. Thus, for the relevance of the research, the three actors of the triple helix model: *government-industry-university, become: government-civil society-university*.

Starting from these considerations, the questionnaires used in the research targeted the following target groups: 1) managements of university education institutions in Romania; 2) students including, in particular, those with disabilities; 3) non-governmental organizations (NGOs/Associations/Federations) whose activity is solving and supporting people with disabilities.

The questionnaires were developed to investigate three main areas, as follows: 1) identification of people with disabilities in higher education (relationship with the state university

¹ Likert scale – is a variant of the scale used for social science research that allows researchers to collect data that provides nuance and information about participants' opinions.

² Surveymonkey, https://www.surveymonkey.com/?ut_source=sem_lp&ut_source2=sem&ut_source3=header, accessed May 2021.

education institution and assessment of their satisfaction with the facilities offered by the state university education institution), 2) assessments regarding the public policies developed at the level of the European Commission for this category of people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and 3) assessments regarding the actions/initiatives at the national level regarding this category of persons with disabilities.

Finding that the distribution of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (including those with disabilities) is almost identical, numerically, in each academic year, as well as their distribution by fields of study or by universities, it was concluded that studying any academic year is equally relevant, which somewhat simplified the research undertaken.

From the analysis and interpretation of the collected answers, presented in detail in subchapter VII.2.5, it emerged, on the one hand, the need for a public policy regarding the studied problem, and on the other hand, actions to improve access to higher education for people with disabilities.

The previously identified actions were then grouped into three categories, depending on the method of solution, all starting from the activation of the triple helix model - model described at the time of defining the object of the research: 1) modernization/creation of the legislative framework and updating of the internal regulations of universities; 2) modernizing the infrastructure, creating support structures or expanding the powers of the existing ones; 3) diversification of means of communication and intensification of dialogue.

III. CONCLUSIONS ON THE RESEARCH CARRIED OUT WITHIN THE THESIS

Following the research carried out, conclusions were formulated on the entire approach, in chapter VIII of the paper: Conclusions. Open issues. Recommendations. Perspectives of improving the access of people with disabilities in the university environment.

Following the application of the questionnaires to the managements of the institutions of higher education in Romania, students including, in particular, those with disabilities and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs/Associations/Federations) whose activity is solving and supporting people with disabilities, it was found:

For the target group "university managements" the response rate was 10 of the 18 universities surveyed, which may reflect a low interest of these higher education institutions towards people with disabilities who wish to pursue undergraduate university studies.

For the target group "students" (with and without disabilities), out of the total of 627 students with disabilities included in the sample, a number of 204 students with disabilities answered, and a number of 4964 students without disabilities out of the total of 5942 in the chosen sample. The large number of responses reflects the interest of students with and without disabilities in this study.

For the target group "NGOs/Federations/Associations" with concerns related to people with disabilities, out of 15 NGOs/Federations/Associations contacted, only 3 organizations responded, of which two with all categories of disabilities and one from the visually impaired category. In addition, we note that one of the organizations did not respond to the questions in the questionnaire, but instead sent a response email containing some opinions indicating the organization's responses to some of the questions, without naming them explicitly.

It can be noted the low number of respondents from this target group (20% of the total), which may reflect a weak interest of these organizations towards disabled people pursuing university studies.

Following the interpretation of the answers received to the questionnaires addressed to the management of the universities, some problems were identified regarding the access to higher education of students with disabilities, with reference to:

- improving (even covering the lack of) national legislation regarding the access of students with disabilities to university programs;
- the need to develop a public policy for students with disabilities.

Analyzing the answers of the university managements, we can find that the universities involve only to a small extent the non-governmental organizations/associations/foundations in adapting/creating an effective study environment for people with disabilities.

The application of the questionnaires faced some problems, the most significant being: the small number of respondents from university managements (10 out of 18) and the extremely small number of respondents from NGOs/Associations/Federations (3 out of 15). We mention these issues because the small number of respondents may influence the accuracy of the interpretation to some extent.

The analysis of students' answers to the questionnaire was done in parallel for the two categories of students, with and without disabilities. From this analysis it emerged that the share of students with disabilities in the 30-40 age category is higher, which can be explained either by some difficulties encountered in continuing their studies, or by the lack of adequate orientation at the end of high school, or by the lack of improvements possible admission and study conditions.

Regarding students with disabilities, it should be noted that only a fifth (three times less than those in the first category) of them feel marginalized, which can lead to the conclusion that the situation is generally good. However, adding to these findings the fact that 17% of these students do not know if they are marginalized, the hypothesis can be advanced that, possibly, the two thirds do not fully know what it means to be marginalized, or have low expectations regarding this subject. At the same time, it should be noted that a very large weight is given to the answers (in both categories of students) that appreciate that students with disabilities exercise their rights and freedoms or that these students can be role models.

Another problem identified in this category would be the low interest of non-disabled students towards studies, which also translates into a lower search for support, either through the implicit consideration of the institution's involvement in their education, a fact that made them stop analyzing if they receive support, to what extent and with what results. Also from the analysis of the responses of students with disabilities, it also emerges that universities can still increase support measures for students with disabilities, for example in terms of the accessibility of information necessary for admission.

As for civil society (NGOs, Associations, etc. - in profile), it can be seen that they are involved in supporting and advising people with disabilities for their as complete integration into society as possible, but this involvement is still at a very low level or, possibly, most disabled people have no contact with these institutions or do not know about their existence.

After analyzing the responses of NGOs/Associations/Federations, it emerged that there is no systematic contact between students with disabilities and associations/foundations/NGOs, which leads to a distorted perception of reality, possibly based on prejudices, of relevant associations/foundations/NGOs (see completely opposite answers of students with disabilities and NGOs/Associations/Federations to certain questions).

For the present research, the following public databases were studied: the National Platform for the Collection of Statistical Data for Higher Education (ANS), the Integrated

Educational Register (REI) and the Single Matriculation Register (RMU). Using general data on students, at the level of study cycle or other forms of studies, respectively field of study and citizenship, depending on the main characteristics of the student (gender, ethnicity, disabilities, time of admission to studies or completion of studies, membership to a disadvantaged group), the following aspects were found: for the category of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds by category and academic year, the distribution is almost identical in each academic year, so the study of any academic year is relevant for the research carried out within the thesis.

Another important aspect is the flow of reports in the ANS. From this perspective, it was found that the reports are not for study years, but for university years. Consequently, in order to be able to study a certain year of studies, it is better to start from the graduates of an academic year differentiated by programs/fields, this information being found in the ANS platform.

Another finding for the same category refers to the fact that most students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are attracted to the branch of science - economic sciences, followed by mechanical engineering, mechatronics, industrial engineering and management, plant and animal resource engineering, medicine, psychology, behavioral sciences and legal sciences. It can also be noted an increase in the annual average compared to previous years, namely 36.66% of the total number of students enrolled in all years of studies, come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds;

By completing the doctoral thesis with the title "Educational policies and strategies for social innovation with impact on university education in Romania", it was possible, including through theoretical and practical research, to highlight the following personal contributions:

- the elaboration of an extensive study on the necessity of elaborating policies in the field of education, focused on social innovation, with an impact on the university educational environment in Romania;
- the study reveals the insufficient concerns of the Romanian society, regarding the access of vulnerable people/who come from socio-economically disadvantaged environments and especially of people with disabilities, regarding their access to university study programs;
- researching extensive and relevant databases for our study;
- accurate identification of essential factors in the research process (target groups, research tools, data analysis and processing).

From the above-presented research, a series of measures resulted that can be included in a public policy aimed at improving access to higher education for people with disabilities, grouped into the three categories previously identified, these measures refer to:

- unitary creation or expansion of an active system for the protection and promotion of the rights of students with disabilities, as well as the identification and establishment of specific measures to guarantee compliance with the provisions of national and international legislation;

- the adoption of legislative provisions requiring universities to implement measures to ensure equal opportunities and combat discrimination, but which do not affect university autonomy;

- granting differentiated funding for people with disabilities;

- the establishment of alternative access routes to higher education for people with disabilities;

creating a learning and evaluation system more adapted to the problems of people with disabilities;

- improving the physical access of students with disabilities to all academic, cultural and social activities of the university;

- improving access to information, in an accessible way;

- implementation of counseling, career guidance and mentoring sessions;

- offering support from volunteer students in accessing the administrative and educational services offered by the university;

- depending on the specific needs generated by the types of students' disabilities, universities should ensure the development of infrastructure and learning resources: access to classrooms, laboratories, libraries, translation of study materials into the Braille alphabet, the existence of specialized staff to can evaluate the knowledge acquired by students, psychological counseling services, etc.;

- universities should invest in innovation and the implementation of new management models, based in particular on student support services;

- universities should make available to students with disabilities, procedures regarding their admission and enrollment based on disability criteria, and also provide explicit information about existing opportunities, facilities and support services available, or any special procedures related to the organization of the competition of admission, rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities, including in formats accessible to people with different types of disabilities;

- increasing the capacity of universities to provide students with disabilities access to information and quality education through technologies and assistive software components customized according to the abilities of people with disabilities;
- universities should be prompted to carefully rethink their role in society and review relations with the entire community;
- universities should conclude partnerships with institutions/organizations active in the field with concerns related to people with disabilities, including student organizations for the benefit of students with disabilities;
- the state should involve more NGOs/Associations/Federations in the development of public policies regarding people with disabilities;
- university managements should take into account the opinions of people with disabilities in the elaboration of socio-economic and budgetary policy documents at the university level;
- universities should optimize study offers in support of employability, and develop complementary courses with an applied component for students with disabilities.

We mention that the study and research carried out in the framework of the doctoral thesis with the title: *"Educational policies and strategies for social innovation with impact on university education in Romania"* capture a sequence of the multiple problems described in the thesis, at the time of its elaboration. The dynamics of social changes being extremely broad and fast, the research carried out can be adapted according to the nature of these changes, so that most problems remain open and with perspectives to be continued through research connected to the realities of contemporary social changes.

I emphasize that I would not have been able to complete the extensive research within this doctoral thesis without the particularly consistent and professional guidance of Prof. Dr. Ani Matei.

I would also like to thank all those who supported me in the various specific activities regarding access to databases, communication with various institutions.

IV. ASPECTS REGARDING BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bibliographic references are contained in chapter IX of the thesis. The bibliography related to our work is structured as follows:

Bibliographic references from specialized literature (303 titles). Here were also included works that dealt with related or transversal themes with our theme so that we could create a complex but detailed picture of the theme treated in the doctoral thesis;

Web Bibliographic References (36 titles). In these resources were included the official documents of the European Commission, the Government of Romania and, respectively, the Ministry of Education, with an emphasis on the current approach: Educated Romania;

Bibliographic references from official documents (10 titles). Official documents (Government Decisions, Laws, etc.) with reference to the topic studied in our thesis were included in this section.

The bibliographic content was created taking into account the specifications and writing requirements imposed by the rigors of the doctoral school and according to the recommendations of the scientific coordinator.

Through the elaboration of this doctoral thesis, we appreciate that it has been possible to open a large "front" of studies and research in the field of improving the access of vulnerable people to the essential values of Romanian society, university education being one of the most important!