

total higher education enrollments jumped from about 400,000 in 1990–1991 to more than 1,800,000 in 2003–2004.

Private higher education institutions exist throughout Poland, although (in keeping with typical patterns cross-nationally) the most prestigious are concentrated in and around large cities. Of the 280 privates, 137 are located in large cities, 57 of them in Warsaw. However, many private providers situated in small cities significantly increase higher education possibilities for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or from rural areas. Private providers deprived of almost any state support develop mainly “low-cost” study programs (as in most of the region and the world) and attract mostly part-time students. They usually offer programs in business, management, education, and political and computer science. Because of the limited number of professors available, private institutions in the beginning of the 1990s offered mainly bachelor’s programs. However, in recent years they have recruited more and more professors, to offer master’s degrees and meet the requirements to confer Ph.D.s. In 2002 more than 90 institutions were authorized to offer master’s degrees and 4 have Ph.D. tracks. The rest, about 150, offer programs at the bachelor’s level.

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Approximately 75 percent of private institution enrollments are part-time students who usually combine study and work in order to pay for higher education. In addition, research conducted in 2001 indicated that most students in the private sector are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from rural areas.

Conclusion

In sum—and this can be a key to private higher education legitimacy—in times of state financial stringency and growing demand for higher education, increasing the accessibility to higher education for low-income students would be hard to achieve without the private higher education sector. Therefore, private institutions are especially valued among older students, who are given the opportunity to raise their educational levels, and among students from lower-income groups and rural areas. On the other hand, the private sector in Poland is still a far cry from having state legitimacy and recognition. Government has chosen to leave the private sector largely to its own devices. There are no direct state appropriations or tax exemptions, and the private sector is not truly incorporated into statewide higher education planning. In sum, while Polish private higher education is substantial in size, the legitimacy of the sector remains a mixed affair.

Romanian Private Higher Education Institutions: Mission Statements

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This article examines a body of data accessible on-line of some relevance to the discussion about the legitimacy of private higher education institutions. By searching their web pages, one can discover how private higher education institutions perceive themselves, their environment, and their mission.

The research included 23 accredited and 28 licensed institutions, listed with the National Council of Academic Evaluation and Accreditation, that represented the state of the Romanian private sector in January 2004. The focus here is on the mission statements presented in the web pages. Not all institutions have explicit mission statements. Thus in some cases other institutional self-descriptions and declarations of goals have been used.

The content of the mission statements, like the design of the web pages, are used by institutions to offer an image of assurance and reliability. The rhetoric of most of the statements is formal, correct, and somewhat bureaucratic. A few statements are poetic or religious in tone. The mission statements are filled with words that are part of the new official rhetoric, and are filled with academic jargon.

Vocationalism

Most of the institutions claim vocational and professional missions: “the creation of specialists competitive on a national and international level”; “preparing specialists able . . . to meet the demands of a market economy, integrated into the European political, social, judicial, and cultural context”; “preparing professionals for the Hungarian community that are competitive on an international level, in a Christian spirit”; “preparation of specialists for Western Romania”; etc. Many institutions emphasize the ability of their graduates to fit into national, international, and European markets or even any other employment context and to have the skills demanded by the labor market. Thus, these website mission statements confirm a frequent observation about contemporary private higher education—namely, its job-oriented focus.

While throughout the world vocationalism might be a common feature of higher education, in Central and Eastern Europe this orientation also continues the value system of higher education that prevailed during the communist regimes. During the reforms started in the 1950s, the mission of higher education was vocational and established on a sys-

temic rather than institutional level. After the so-called polytechnization reforms, higher education was intended to produce an intellectual proletariat for the national economy. All degrees offered by communist higher education were linked to the professions. Over half the graduates were in engineering, and all faculties in the humanities, arts, and sciences became in fact teacher training institutions.

The academic drift in the public sector after 1990 came as a surprise to a large part of the population. Opinion polls taken in academia detected the changes in the value system. The expansion of higher education and the shift away from the vocational mission characterized the 1990s. It was apparent that disorder accompanied the autonomization of public higher education institutions. Fears concerning higher education expansion were voiced by the mass media, politicians, and civil society. Private universities in need of recognition preferred to present a value system closer to general public opinion of what higher education was meant to be.

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Yet, during the expansion of the early 1990s many young people entered the public system, and changes in the leadership of higher education institutions took place. The former leaders—senior eminent professors—were in the best position to transfer their prestige into profits on the private higher education market. Thus, the vocational mission of these higher education institutions also reflects the internalized values of their creators.

The vocational character of Romanian higher education can also be traced back to a Napoleonic model of higher education, initiated as early as 1818 with the creation of the High Technical School in Bucharest, which later became the Polytechnic University. This tradition has evolved into higher education's role in preparing specialists, its inclusion in economic and administrative rather than cultural trends, and its relation to the needs of the economy or of society.

Elitism

Another frequent element in the mission statements is elite education. This perspective appears on the websites of accredited institutions, based in Bucharest, that have larger enrollments and broad disciplinary ranges. One explicitly states it is “a university in the classical sense,” while others describe themselves as “an elite university with elite graduates,” “an elite higher education institution,” and “devoted to academic excellence.” While there are no relevant differences between the quality of web pages of accredited and authorized institutions, so-called elite institutions have more complex and better-designed pages. Still, elite institutions do not pretend to be superior to public higher education institutions. Instead, they often make the point of having similar standards or “the same

quality as some of the best public universities.” The real quality of these institutions, of course, cannot be judged from the information we have at hand.

One explanation for the current debate over elite status is also related to the communist heritage. Most of Europe had already passed through some expansionist phase by the end of the 1980s, when Romania had the lowest number of students per 100,000 inhabitants in Europe (except for Albania). The expansion of the higher education system, the liberalization of access, and private higher education itself changed the context.

The founders of some private institutions sensed the need of prospective students and parents for elite education that had slowly but surely declined in the public sector. Still, private institutions, elite or not, have a lower prestige than most public universities.

Conclusion

Almost all private higher education institutions define themselves in relation to external factors. Private higher education institutions conform to the set of values based on communist higher education's rhetoric of elite vocational education. The institutions in our study revealed themselves as mostly conservative in their mission statements and in the design of their web pages. This might be a result of the institutions' need to satisfy the expectations of their stakeholders, the normative characteristics of their leaders, and the disciplinary structure of the institutions. ■

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Confronting Corruption: Ukrainian Private Higher Education

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The vice rector of a leading state university in Ukraine stated in an interview that allegations of bribery for such actions as admission to the university, passing courses, and recommendations were the misguided thinking of “hooligans and malcontents.” While other Ukrainian academics are also willing to make the dubious claim that they had never seen anyone taking bribes, the allegations of substantial if not pervasive corruption in all sectors of Ukrainian higher education persist. Now that approximately 175 private institutions of higher education have attained some level of accreditation, it is important to try and understand the challenges facing that sector as a result of corruption.