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## Quality Culture in the Romanian Higher Education

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### Abstract

In modern times, the concept of quality of education has undergone a series of transformations so that the universities could better meet the growing expectations of the various members of the society. The objective of our paper is to highlight and analyse important aspects related to the quality culture evolution in the Romanian higher education. In compiling this article, we have used as information sources the Romanian and foreign literature. Also, the content analysis of the Romanian legislation on Romanian education after 1990 was an information support for this material. To reach the purpose of the study, we have used as research methods the analysis and synthesis and conducted a reflection type study. We conclude that there has been a shift in the quality culture in the Romanian higher education in the last twenty years, following the European and international trend of passage from quality definition, assurance and guarantee from inside the university to outside it.

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*Keywords:* education quality; quality culture; Romanian higher education; the Bologna Process; students; graduates employability; labour market

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### 1. Problem Statement

*Useful knowledge* presents itself in two different forms: “propositional knowledge – that describes very natural phenomena, including scientific and epistemological approach/prescriptive knowledge, which suggest how this knowledge can be applied, meaning full instructions on necessary activities. The purpose of a society based on knowledge is to build an interactive link (feedback) between this type of knowledge (Butnariu and Milosan, 2012)”. (Barbat, 2013, p. 186). *Educational capital* has two distinct forms: “on one hand, there are the abilities acquired as a result of participating at the formal educational systems, knowledge confirmed by diplomas; on the other hand, there are any other knowledge and abilities that have been acquired during the life time, by personal efforts or by contacts

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with experts in different fields finalized with knowledge gains as a result of assimilating the knowledge received by interaction with them” (Popovici (Barbulescu), 2012). Introduced in the sixth decade of the 20th century in the U.S., *the concept of insuring quality* has also expanded to *education*. The term “*quality*” refers to “performances that an organization providing services can achieve and arises from the contribution of all activities directly or indirectly related to the conception and development of the service” (Pițurcă & Popovici, 2011). In modern times, the concept of *quality of education* has undergone a series of transformations so that universities could better meet the growing expectations of the various members of society among whom being and working. *Education quality* is defined as a set of characteristics of a study program and its provider which meet beneficiaries’ expectations and quality standards. Under the nowadays approach, *quality* is directly related to learning outcomes: knowledge level, attitudes, beliefs, values, general skills and competences. *Culture* represents a very important factor for progress, the word “culture” being most commonly used in three basic senses:

- “An integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning”;
- “The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a population, community, institution, organization or group”;
- “Excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities, also known as high culture” (Cristea & Popa, 2013). The cultural capital “[...] underlies the human and social capital, describes the potential of a group or society and defines the culture of progress / stagnation / regress” (Cristea & Popa, 2013).

Society has accepted the universities’ “ivory tower” attitude until about thirty years ago, being pleased with the quality assurance inside the university. *But in the late 1970’s, in different European countries and on other continents the first accrediting bodies have occurred. Higher education quality has thus become to be defined and guaranteed not by the university, but outside it. Accreditation in higher education* is a final process, which aims at measuring the quality of the education of the higher education institution, based on criteria, standards and indicators. It leads to the modification of the status of specialization, faculty or institution, in this case the university (Pițurcă & Popovici, 2011). *In Romania, accreditation* is a multifunctional process that has been imposed in education, generated by the creation of private universities. This process characterizes only the post-communist era, not having existed ever before in our country, due to the inexistence of the private higher education in Romania prior to 1990.

## 2. Purpose of Study

*The objective of our paper* is to highlight and analyses important aspects related to *the quality culture evolution in the Romanian higher education* in the last twenty years. From the three definitions of the concept of *culture* quoted before, we have used the second one: “The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a population, community, institution, organization or group”. We have applied it to higher education institutions.

## 3. Methods

In compiling this article, we have used as information sources the Romanian and foreign literature. Also, the content analysis of the Romanian legislation on Romanian education after 1990 was an information support for this material. To reach the purpose of the study, we have used as research methods *the analysis and synthesis* and conducted a reflection type study.

## 4. Quality Culture Evolution in the Romanian Higher Education

The Romanian higher education has been following the European and international trend of passage from quality definition, assurance and guarantee from inside the university to outside it. In this purpose, in 1993, *The National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (N. C. A. E. A.)* was established by the Law no. 88/1993. It represented *the first accrediting body* and it was seen at the time as a bold initiative, a pioneering action at European level. On the other hand, *the establishment of a national accreditation authority was an urgent need in Romania.*

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