Book Review

The Statistical Monograph of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. 100 generations of graduates **Author: Nicolae Istudor (coord.), Emilia Gogu, Dumitru Miron, Alexandru Isaic-Maniu, Ion Vorovenci**

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With a history dating back more than a century, the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (further on also referred to as ASE) is passing through a stage when its institutional maturity and its valuable contribution to the Romanian higher education system are widely acknowledged. On the other hand, the university is currently facing the challenges characteristic of these turbulent times, when numerous factors are generating uncertainty about both the present and the future. Within such a context, the concerns related to understanding the specific trends that characterise the evolution of a university and to designing sustainable development strategies are naturally intertwined with a genuine interest in the history of the institution. Undoubtedly, the past academic experience and events cannot be brought back to life and mechanically integrated into the current university practices, but they can help us better assess the present and future opportunities and risks, identify ways and means to surpass the challenges of the present and welcome the future with a proactive attitude. An analysis of the institutional history can be an invaluable source of wisdom when dealing with the challenges of the present and the uncertainties of the future.

In an interview given in the spring of 2019, Ioan Aurel Pop, President of the Romanian Academy, was saying that „*Historical knowledge cannot help us guess the future, but it can help us better manage the present and prepare the future... One may say that the past is less valuable for the future than the present, but we should not forget that the present inevitably becomes past and that, without noticing it, the future becomes present and then past. If we do not value the past... then we do not value the life that is coming after us.* [Apud Korka, M. (2019) *Un secol de design curricular în învățământul superior comercial din România*. In

English: *Centennial Curriculum Design in Romanian Commercial Higher Education*, ASE Printing House, Bucharest, p. 18].

Animated by the belief that there is a genuine need for well documented history, the rectors of our university have encouraged historians and economists to research the past of the university and to bring back to life events and personalities that marked the development of our institution. The ASE Printing House has ensured the publication of these works at a high graphic quality.

The Statistical Monograph of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. 100 generations of graduates (further on referred to as the *Statistical Monograph*) completes the series of works published in 2013 on the occasion of the university's centenary. Conceived as a chronicle in figures of the evolution of ASE, it proves to be a dynamic portrait which documents the development of the institution from the moment it was founded until the present day.

The monograph of a complex institution such as a university involves detailed research into the multiple aspects of its operation. Such a work is usually accompanied by documents, testimonials, photographs and other relevant types of information. The *Statistical Monograph* comprises all the above, together with pertinent statistics presented in the form of complete series of data on the aspects that used to define the functioning of the organisation over certain periods of time.

The first generations of professors of the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies (nowaday's ASE) cherished genuine transparency and published, sometimes annually, other times every 4-5 years, statistical reports regarding the institutional activity, without hesitating to include the shortcomings alongside the achievements.

The tradition of publishing statistics on the activity of every higher education institution in Romania was interrupted by the 1948 education reform, imposed by the political interests of the new regime. Since that time, the publication of statistical data was restricted, leading to a lower level of transparency, while allowing the political power to intervene at its own will in the activity of the institutions which were part of the system. As an effect of this reform inspired by dogmas and practices which had nothing to do with the traditions of the Romanian education system, the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies was confronted with a change in its educational mission. Curricula had, thus, to be reformulated, in order to include the political education of the future graduates, academic staff were severelly purged, and the institutional structure became unstable. Moreover, between 1948-1953, our institution was no longer allowed to organise doctoral studies, in spite of its tradition and the good reputation it enjoyed within Romanian society. Unfortunately, the concern for publishing statistical data regarding the activity of the university has remained sporadic even in the 30 years which followed after the downfall of the communist regime in December 1989.

It is within this context that one should understand the authors' objective of presenting and commenting upon a collection of annual statistical data on the functioning of our university during the timespan of the first 100 generations of graduates (from the first enrolment in 1913 to the promotion which graduated in 2019). It was only due to the perseverance and professionalism of a small group of experts in documentary and archival research that the series of statistical data could be recovered and analysed, thus creating the premises for a better understanding of our institutional development.

It is often said that unwritten facts do not go down in history. In the case of our university, the facts were systematically recorded, but more often than not they remained unknown to members of the academic community and the public at large. This is why we are stating that only the facts which are shared with the public can be remembered. *The Statistical Monograph of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies* offers insights into the history of our university and, thus, allows us to acknowledge its value.

The sources of documentation for this monograph were varied. Laws, decrees, government decisions, minister's orders, regulations and other documents with an impact on the existence and functioning of the university were identified in the State Archives and the Archives of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. Besides these, there were minutes of management meetings, documents prepared by the administrative bodies upon request from the rector's office, annual reports published periodically by the heads of the institution, graduates' testimonials, anniversary volumes edited by ASE or by some of the faculties and departments. Extracting the information from all these sources and organising it as series of data represented a laborious process, characterised by perseverance and attention to detail. When the documentary sources included divergent data, the monograph authors preferred to use comparative analysis, thus allowing the reader the freedom to assess the value of the information.

The documentary material collected, processed and analysed by the authors is presented on 1170 pages, organised into 12 thematic chapters, grouped in two volumes, so as to consistently present the multi-faceted transformations which took place during the 107 years covered by the monograph.

From a methodological perspective, the unitary approach is ensured by the fact that the thematic chapters reflect the three distinctive stages in the history of ASE – the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. These stages have different characteristics given by the social and political environment in which the university operated, as well as by its publicly assumed mission and by the way in which it was managed:

- The first period (1913-1948) was characterised by the human, financial and material efforts to build and consolidate the good reputation of the university. After experimenting for one year with a single curriculum, the university leaders became interested in conceiving and implementing a diversified educational offer, adapted to the requirements of an economy and a state administration facing the effects of modernisation and internationalisation. It was a time when outstanding intellectual personalities were attracted in order to form and develop an elite teaching staff. This was the time when the Palace of the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies was erected and extended and when the labs were equipped with specific teaching facilities.

- The second period (1948-1989) was characterised by the politicisation of the educational content and function, the replacement of the traditional curriculum meant to train economists with a variety of professional profiles with curricula that educated the undergraduates in a political spirit and offered an increasingly vague professional specialisation. The educational reform of 1948 was systematically followed by invasive measures in the activity of higher education institutions translated into the loss of the decision making autonomy, political control over the composition of the teaching staff and over the teaching and research activity.

- The third period started after the downfall of Ceausescu's regime in December 1989. After a quick depoliticisation of the teaching activity, there followed years of concern related to aligning the curriculum to the modern practices of similar higher education institutions in the Euro-Atlantic area. In 2004-2005, the Romanian higher education in the economic field took its first steps towards implementing the Bologna principles and specific instruments. The Bucharest University of Economic Studies – co-founder of the Romanian Association of Economic Faculties – played a decisive role in harmonising the procedures for implementing the recommendations agreed at ministry level into the practice of economic and business administration faculties with a view to creating the European Higher Education Area.

The first volume of the *Statistical Monograph* starts with the presentation of documents, historic data and statistical information regarding the founding, consolidation and development of the higher education institution and its campus throughout the three above-mentioned periods of time. Besides showing how the material infrastructure of the teaching and learning activities developed, the book highlights aspects related to the organisational structure of the university, the social and medical support offered to the undergraduates (student accommodation, canteens, medical centre), as well as the editorial activities for teaching purposes). Another aspect covered is the dissemination of the results of original research carried out by members of the teaching staff in information bulletins and university annals. The introductory chapter ends with the presentation of the current ASE University Charter and with a detailed quantitative analysis of the various facets in their inter-relatedness which define our university the way it is today.

The second chapter deals with the dynamics of the institutional organisation by faculties, specialisations and departments correlated with the evolution of the academic offer and the admission to university throughout the three historic stages. The wealth of statistical information and organisational details regarding the education process is an invitation to reflection addressed to anyone interested in the development strategies of higher education institutions. Our university has found solutions in a variety of historic, social and economic contexts, managing to survive during the first World War, to develop resilience during the communist regime, to regain its identity and enhance the quality of its performance after the December 1989 Revolution.

Restoring the lists including the teaching staff is the object of another chapter. The idea started from a very special piece of writing – *Report for the years 1913-1918*. This was published in 1918 and can be considered the first collection of statistical data of the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies, distributed to the public at large. At the end of this document, there is a complete list with the teaching staff of the first five academic years. Next to each teacher's name there is the following information: specialisation upon graduation; the field of the doctoral studies; the institution which

awarded the PhD title; the document testifying the appointment at the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies. *The General Ledger (Cartea Mare)* put together by the university's Accounting Office between 1955 and 1958 was another source of inspiration for listing and analysing all the full time staff of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies over the last decades. The information is accompanied by short analyses of the teaching staff dynamics, as well as by insightful graphs comparing ASE's teaching staff with that of other Romanian tertiary education institutions.

Another chapter tackles the dynamics of the managerial staff at university, faculty and department levels, while also analysing the structure of the teaching staff by teaching position and the ratio teaching staff-auxiliary and administrative staff. The synoptic tables and statistical graphs annexed to this chapter make it easy to draw comparisons both among the faculties and the various academic years. They highlight how the employment and promotion principles and practices differed substantially during the three historic periods included in this *Statistical Monograph*.

The second volume of the *Statistical Monograph* is dedicated to the students and graduates who stand proof of the influence of the university on the national and international economic and scientific environment. The statistical research in this volume follows the structure of the first volume, organised around the three historic periods mentioned above. The statistical tables and graphs are the result of perseverent work for the reconstruction of the series of data. Due to the diversity and simplicity of the information provided, they can also be perceived as an invitation to further in-depth analyses of the dynamics of the student population at university level. According to the authors of this volume, throughout its existence, our university has contributed to shaping a significant number of professional destinies, the cumulated number of graduates who obtained a bachelor degree reaching 237831, of which 8515 graduated between 1918-1948, 85099 between 1948-1989 and 144217 between 1990-2019. The number of master programme graduates between 1995-2019 amounted to 63026. The total number of doctoral study graduates was 5046, structured as follows: 156 between 1913-1948, 917 during the 1953-1989 period and 3973 between 1990-2019. Besides these data regarding university education during the 107 years of existence of our university, the volume offers information about the tens of students who are enrolling annually in postgraduate and postdoctoral advanced research programmes organised by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

In the first two chapters of this volume offer an impressive collection of time series and statistical distributions which are relevant for the multi-criteria analysis of the student population observed as entities grouped around faculties and study programmes.

The third chapter is dedicated to presenting and commenting on the statistical data referring to the students who attended various forms of postgraduate programmes. It is only natural that starting with the 2005-2006 academic year, the focus is on the students enrolled in the master programmes offered by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. The statistics

presented highlight the fact that after an exuberant start, with an excessive number of master programmes, the faculties reached a maturity stage, promoting those programmes which had proven competitive on an educational market in full expansion. The institutional reputation, the quality of the teaching-learning process and novelty of the programmes were the main factors which determined the streamlining of the offer for postgraduate studies.

The legal framework of doctoral studies, the regulation for organising them and the statistics of doctoral students, doctoral graduates and doctoral coordinators are the subject of the fourth chapter. For the first time in the history of information made available by our university to the public at large, the fifth chapter presents statistics by academic years, alongside complete lists of the doctoral students who successfully defended their theses, starting with the first one in 1924 and ending with the list of doctoral titles in economic sciences awarded in 2019.

The next two chapters – the sixth and the seventh – contain unprecedented information regarding the cultural, sports and social associative activities which have accompanied the teaching-learning process throughout the whole existence of our university. Beyond the statistical summaries and documentary evidence of the presence of these elements in the life of the academic community, the reader can also find here information referring to the institutional regulatory framework which has facilitated the associative actions with a beneficial effect on campus life during all the historic periods analysed.

In addition to this, the eighth chapter of the *Statistical Monograph* offers an overview of the scientific, political and economic personalities from Romania and abroad, whose contributions to the development of economic sciences and the progress of economic higher education were acknowledged at academic level between 1913 and 2019.

Through its content, *The Statistical Monograph of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. 100 generations of graduates* is sending a threefold message to its readers: it is a homage brought to both the students and the teachers who have animated the university theatre halls, study rooms and libraries over more than 100 years; it is a reference point in understanding the mission and responsibilities of the present time and, above all, it is a call to the future generations of students and teachers to honour the memory of the past and to continue the ancestors' endeavour to increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of the institution and to have its value recognised at national and international level.

About the authors

A team of the teaching staff of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies – BUES (in Romanian: ASE) has produced this impressive work concerning the history of our university:

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More than 70 consultants working in the faculties and functional services of BUES have offered advice to the authors in the design and writing of the *Statistical Monograph*.