

Le marketing universitaire – innovation communicationnelle pour survivre efficacement sur le plan (inter)-national

Mariana NICOLAE*
Roxana MARINESCU**

Résumé : Au temps de la mondialisation il est très important pour les universités de décider quelle est leur position sur le marché éducationnel pour survivre du point de vue universitaire, d'autant que pour définir leur rôle et pour clarifier leur statut. L'article que nous proposons explore l'importance de construire son identité de communication cohérente pour assurer l'adaptabilité des universités roumaines aux besoins de son public roumain et de celui international. Le but est d'analyser les stratégies de communication utilisées du point de vue institutionnel pour annoncer le changement à toutes les personnes et institutions intéressées en utilisant des voies diverses (newsletters, website, réunions formelles et

informelles aux différents niveaux de l'organisation, etc.), ainsi que les réponses du public, autrement dit l'efficacité de ces stratégies de communication. L'étude de cas analysée est l'Académie d'études économiques de Bucarest, son identité, sa vision et mission et ses stratégies de développement, autant qu'elles sont transmises par les documents officiels de l'université, ainsi que leur impact sur le public. L'analyse de ce processus commence par la définition de l'Académie d'études économiques de Bucarest comme "université de recherche et d'enseignement qui organise une préparation supérieure et scientifique dans le domaine des études économiques et administratives", définition approuvée par le Sénat en

* Professeur des universités docteur, Vice-doyen, Académie d'Etudes Economiques, mariana.nicolae@rei.ase.ro

** Chargée de cours docteur, Académie d'Etudes Economiques, roxana.marinescu@rei.ase.ro

2007 (www.ase.ro). Dans l'article on discute le passage d'une institution de masse à une institution d'élite par le développement de la recherche, des programmes d'études approfondies et doctorales, en même temps en réduisant les programmes de licence et d'enseignement à distance. Puisqu'une dimension importante du processus de formation identitaire regarde sa réception par le

public on a donné un questionnaire aux professeurs, aux étudiants et aux fonctionnaires administratifs dont les résultats sont inclus dans cet article.

Mots-clés : marketing universitaire, identité organisationnelle, communication organisationnelle, marchés éducationnels, mondialisation

University Marketing – Innovative Communication for Effective Inter/national Survival

Abstract: Positioning of universities on the different educational markets is critical for academic survival, role definition and status clarification on the present education markets. The latter are defined by the globalization of educational services, an increased number of players and their almost fierce competition to attract students and funding. The ever increasing competitiveness all over the world, the new missions that universities have to assume due to pressures from stakeholders, and also from global processes (among which demographics and technology are ever more uncomfortable) are important issues that call for a clear organisational communication, as well as for an effective inter-organisations information exchange. The present paper explores the importance of identity building for a coherent communication process meant to ensure the adaptability of a Romanian university to the needs of

both its Romanian public, and also to those of an international audience. The case study under discussion is The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies (BAES), its identity, vision and mission and strategies development. The analysis of the identity building process in the BAES starts from the definition of the university as a “research and teaching university which organises higher and scientific preparation in the area of economic and administrative studies”, as approved by the Senate in 2007 (www.ase.ro). As an important dimension of the identity building process refers to its reception by the public involved, a questionnaire was given to a number of staff and students. The findings of this questionnaire, as well as several opinions verbalised during formal and informal meetings and personal conversations are included in this study.

Keywords: university marketing, organizational communication,
organizational identity, globalization, educational markets

Globalisation and academia

The world we live in today, called by some “the global village”, is a new communication era of fast information and IT channels and of a global media power. We witness a growth of cross-border systems of rapid knowledge exchange that have clearly and definitely changed our understanding of the society we live in. The new world is among other things the world of multinational companies, of new trans-national forces, of political and military organizations, of global systems of telecommunications.

In his 1994 book, *Liberation Management* with the intriguing subtitle *Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties*, one of the very successful management gurus of the US, Tom Peters, explores the “voyage into the permanently ephemeral” world of the economy of post-industrial societies (Peters, 1992). He claims we live in the age of data bases, performance indicators, customer value which is valuable only if it adds value to the company balance sheet. At one end of the spectrum, there are consumerism, massification, material culture, while we endlessly search for increased productivity, increased earnings to lead to increased consumption. At the other end, globalization, democratization, complexity, which define the search for empowerment, equal opportunities, better living to lead to an ever elusive happiness.

In this context, of today’s globalised world, it is imperative for universities to redesign their identity building strategies in order to reshape their public image, while at the same time they innovate their marketing tools for a better communication with all their stakeholders. Positioning on the educational markets and role clarification in the increasingly competitive academic world are critical, due to the pressures of global processes (among which demographics and technology are ever more uncomfortable) and the fierce competition to attract students and funding of an increased number of players.

Communication: what?, who? and how?

Therefore we should ask ourselves what the role of communication is in this complex world. And, consequently, what the role of communication is in a world in which some of the major political, social and economic issues are blamed on lack of communication, while the happy situations when things are changed for the better are explained through a diversity of beneficial factors out of which good communication skills and best practices are, generally, on the last place. A search on Google for “communication” shows 349,000,000 entries which include the titles of the immense number of books that have been published and continue to be published on the subject and of university or training courses that are constantly offered to the public with the promise of improved skills and increased efficiency.

The topic of communication has only recently come to be discussed and appreciated in Romania and not only. People no longer debate the importance of the study of communication in contemporary society; that is an issue which seems to have been clearly settled. Moreover, communication in business is even more important; as Peter Drucker clearly underlined: “the ability to organize and express ideas in writing and speaking is perhaps the most valuable skill a person can possess in a very large organisation and the more upwards one is on the hierarchy, the more vital this skill becomes” (Drucker, 1952, p.327) . In this context, we would like to stress the importance of communication at the level of universities and higher education institutions, as part of the larger process of university marketing.

Overview of the Romanian universities' status after EU accession

After Romania joined the European Union in January 2007, complex discussions appeared on the one hand about quality standards necessary for a competitive education system and on the other hand about the role of universities in the knowledge-based society (Constantin, 2006). This happens naturally as the idea that responsibility for human resources necessary for social progress belongs to educational institutions, as “progress test-tube, which allow every nation to better and more profitably connect to the global economy” (our translation, Constantin, 2006, p. 11). Thus, it is only normal for universities to redefine their role, to reformulate their mission and to redirect towards developing long-term strategies which should allow them to become dynamic organisations, capable of permanently and constantly offering education and training to society, while facing competition on this market. First and foremost, at this moment Romanian universities face the imperative of restructuring their institutional discourse from a purely declarative to a demonstrative and transparent one. This is not easily done, one of the reasons being that the actors on the Romanian educational market are more and more numerous, as competition for attracting a greater number of students (while population is

generally decreasing) is no longer restricted to the Romanian universities, but includes European ones as well. Unfortunately, although the Romanian education system has been constantly restructured and reformed, with the aim of attaining recognised quality standards, which should make it competitive on the international market of educational services, the general impression is that it continues to be relatively inadequate. (Bogdan, 2007, p. 4).

Universities - marketing quality

Universities: actors on educational markets

The discussion regarding educational markets, scientific production, educational clients was difficult enough a decade ago (Nicolae, 2002, p. 2), when the higher education institutions thought they were not part of the competition in the business world as they were only after a relatively ideal profit, that of knowledge in general, of science for science's sake, a profit difficult to quantify. Nowadays we have a situation in which higher education institutions need to justify their activity in increasingly sophisticated ways. Also we are witnessing more and more heated debates regarding educational markets and their more important actors. These are more often than not visible in the various classifications or rankings of universities, which for some people represent a very good way of universities transmitting their accomplishments to the wider public, a relatively transparent and continuously improving instrument for various stakeholders, mainly students and their parents, while for some other people rankings are debatable and even unethical contributing to the increase of the rich-poor divide.

The classifications of higher education institutions are increasingly more important factors of university recognition; they are compiled and published in the media before the university application process starts. While in the 20th century, education was dominated by the American universities, mainly due to the substantial government investment and also due to European education migration in the 1940's and 1950's (Romania contributed with some well-known people: Mircea Eliade, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, George E. Palade. Also, we could add to this list Matei Călinescu, Andrei Codrescu, Radu Florescu, or the younger academics Maria Bucur, Mariana Cărpinișan, Cornel Ban, etc.). At the same time their success is due to the fact that during the cold war, the federal government greatly contributed to financing academic institutions.

Therefore one of the ways in which actors on educational markets are identified is to compile such classifications or rankings, highly attractive for the consumers: students, possible candidates, alumni, as well as employers, investors, sponsors and governments. These classifications function as a reducing uncertainty factor in an environment in which the decision-making process is difficult and

multi-folded: the decision of parents to support their children's applications to the best quality universities (or to those offering the best return on their investment), the decision of the candidates themselves to choose one university over others (depending on the quality of education or possibly on the opportunities of studying abroad or for some on the quality of life on the campus. There is also the decision of the financing organisms to fund one or another of the educational market players, depending on the social, economic and political needs at the respective moment in time.

Rankings are therefore a way in which universities market themselves to their stakeholders, while at the same time investing in research in order to make students' learning more efficient. In other words if the students do not perceive that their leaning is made easier, more interactive and more pleasant, then they will go towards another, more "student-friendly" institution. Therefore a university which invests more in learning methods and strategies and which at the same time communicates better with its stakeholders will be able to attract a larger number of students. In their turn, those will contribute through the school fees they pay, as well as through their commitment towards good educational and career goals to the further development of the respective university.

Naturally, the students choose the university after they carefully analyse the offer on the educational market from very pragmatic perspectives: costs and benefits they will have to cover as students and afterwards as graduates of a certain institution. A 2006 study in The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies on the *Efficiency of Evaluation in The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies*, underlined that 60% of the 1,008 candidates of the Faculty of International Business and Economics (FIBE) who took part in the survey had opted for this academic specialty because of the perspectives it offers after graduation. These perspectives are connected especially with the career the candidate will have after graduation, many people considering that university studies are a means of earning more money or following a diplomatic career. Only 20% of the sample in discussion chose FIBE due to the high level of knowledge and skills available in the respective faculty.

But equally important in order to obtain inter/national recognition is to clarify the research effort of the university. is Research represents an important component in international classifications. In the Shanghai classification for example, which is one of the most popular ones due to its high media profile, research represents a significant part in establishing academic hierarchies. "According to it, university hierarchy is based on focussing on evaluating research results and on the scientific quality of the academic body. It proposes a classification based on four indicators: (1) the quality of education (graduates with Nobel prizes and Field medals) – 10%; (2) quality of the teaching staff (professors with Nobel prizes and Field medals and ISI publications) – 40%; (3) results of

research (ISI and Nature & Science articles) – 40%; (4) the institutional dimension – 10%” (Agachi, 2006, p. 4).

The desire of universities to get into these classifications, followed by obtaining a relevant place vis-à-vis the mission the institution had decided for itself is a special factor in establishing the institutional strategy. Universities cannot exist on a highly competitive market without a self-definition against the other actors and especially without getting the development funds they need. Thus they enter a vicious circle in which on the one hand research is reduced because a lack of funds, and on the other hand funds are received for research activity of a certain quality and directed towards the priorities of the financing institutions. For example, the E.U. Framework Programme 7, the major financing source for European research clearly describes the areas they wish to invest in by defining themes and activities which will be financed in each area. One of the main eligibility criteria for an institution is to unequivocally opt for the themes and areas representing the priorities of the respective financing session. The underlying philosophy is clear: *“The concept behind Ideas is that first-rate researchers are best placed to identify new opportunities and directions at the frontiers of knowledge”* (FP7 Factsheets).

Who benefits classifications?

The number of organisations making classifications has grown recently; also a group of experts was set up, and it became influent enough to prepare information materials and to offer consultancy to UNESCO (Stella, 2006, p. 2). The target audience of these classifications and a possible explanation (although not the only one) of this high popularity are the parents and the future students. More and more parents and candidates analyse the educational market to get the best possible return on their investment while the promise of an optimistic perspective for future employment is becoming more complex and more costly from the financial point of view, as well as from the point of view of the effort spent to get the respective qualification.

In parallel with the increase in popularity of classifications and with the appearance of a new institution which has to compile them, there is the normal reaction of the academia which comes up with arguments against their too great importance. One of their main arguments is that the classification process has become a very profitable business, the proof being that these classifications are published usually right before admission procedures in higher education institutions. However, the truth is that these lists containing the 20, 50, 100 or 200 universities all over the world do not essentially contribute to the value profile of a university. On the contrary, they can affect negatively the reputation of a university. A U.S. study underlines this effect and draws attention to the pressures made on American universities to improve the items considered for the classification. Thus, there are

universities that give financial support to attract a greater number of students, in other words they “buy” their students (Stella, 2006, p. 21).

One of the most important criticisms is that classifications are based more on elements that can be quantified and less on the truly relevant criteria, i.e. criteria that mirror the quality of education. Academics themselves believe that an indicator for the quality of teaching would be very important but it is difficult to define and quantify, it is cost-ineffective and time consuming. Therefore it is only used in three out of ten classification systems. (Stella, 2006, p. 10).

Therefore, depending on their own development strategies, and on the redefinition of the role they want to play in the Romanian society, universities will consider classifications as an indicator for either entering world hierarchies or for ensuring visibility at national level. Romania’s new status, of a EU member country, creates the premises for the opening of the Romanian educational market for the European, or even world, one. However, the positioning on these markets will not be made without the existence of a competitive advantage in the offer for the Romanian students, who nowadays have many more options, and also for the international ones, who can find strong enough reasons to study in Romania.

The example of Hungary is illustrative; with three universities in the top 500 universities (University Szeged on 202 – 301 and 501-600 in QS Topuniversities 2009, Budapest University Tech, Eotvos Lorand University on 404-502 in Top 500 World Universities from the Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China and 401-500 in QS Topuniversities 2009), Hungarian universities succeed in attracting a great number of international students. (Agachi, 2006, p. 23).

We should ask ourselves the question whether Romanian universities will be able to articulate clearly their offer, so that it is credible and motivating for the candidates. Do the Romanian universities wish to enter such a competition? Theoretically, they do, as foreign students represent a source not only of financing, but also of image capital for the universities, who aim to promote diversity and intercultural dialogues, and this not only in theory through their curriculum, but also practically, through facilitating students and academics mobility. Programmes with international students are more attractive even for domestic students who thus have one more justification (although subjective and debatable) for the value of the respective programme.

But the question is: are Romanian universities ready to meet the demands of foreign students who look for educational services, as well as administrative ones, with a quality close to that of the other UE universities? Is social life on Romanian campuses at the level of the students’ expectations? The answer is unfortunately negative. The lack of clear, transparent, procedures, available in other

languages are the first criticism, which are brought by the foreign students in Romania within the Erasmus mobilities programme. The difficulty of accessing information, the lack of dynamism in bringing information up-to-date, when there are universities internet sites is another problem of Romanian universities. For example, The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies (BAES) with approximately 40 000 (Strategia ASE 2008-2014, p. 2) students in all education programmes, has a concise English and French version of its internet site. However, the information here is not updated. Figure 1 shows a print screen of the site done on 19 March 2010. In the right lower corner we can notice the reference to the celebrations of the 95 anniversary of BAES from 2008, while under the button “Conferences and Symposia” (on the left) the information is from 2007. Otherwise the versions in English and French are a good attempt at providing international students with some practical information on life in Bucharest.

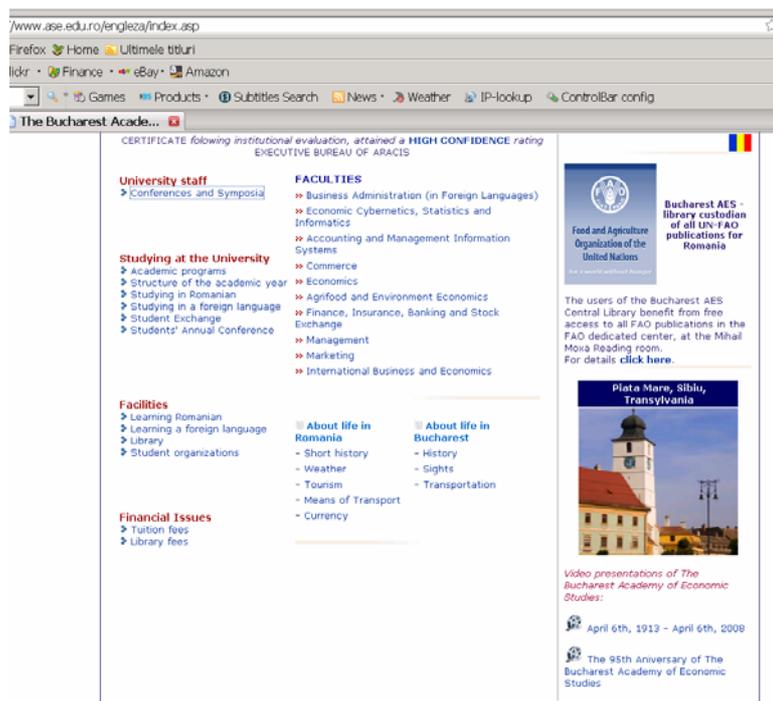


Figure 1: Print screen of the English version of The BAES site, retrieved on 19 March 2010

Classifications and the lessons to learn

One of the positive aspects of university classifications is improving the educational services following an honest competition and goodwill among services providers. Paradoxically though, discussions about quality and the increasingly sophisticated educational services take place in parallel with the decrease in the interest of students for learning, which is happening all over the world, not just in Romania. There are on the one hand institutions that make efforts – real or just stated - to invest in more and more innovative learner-centred pedagogies, and on the other hand there are more and more students who only superficially study in tertiary education. When they do, their only aim is to have a degree, and they are not interested in obtaining or developing their professional competencies.

“As Romania strives to become a country with a performing economy which should satisfy both the investors’ and the employers’ expectations” the decrease in the real interest for learning should be seriously analysed. At a theoretical and programmatic level there are positive signals for investing in human resources. Romania would propose for itself to progress through “productivity which has to grow through investment in productive capital, in equipment and technologies, and also in human capital”. (The national reference framework. 2006, p. 81).

This means a significant increase in the qualified human resource, respectively in the number of students who could actively participate, when graduating tertiary education, in the progress of the Romanian economy. However “between 1999 and 2003 (...) the percentage of people with degrees raised with only 0.9 points up to 9.6%. The percentage is small compared to other countries’ (at the level of 1999): the United States – 16.4% or the United Kingdom – 1.4% “ (The national reference framework. 2006, p. 89). The causes are several, but we can suppose that the fragmentation of the educational markets in Romania, the lack of transparency and dynamism in transmitting information to the public, as well as a centralised and bureaucratic system of decision-taking in universities are factors which explain the relatively slow growth of the student population.

The lack of transparency is a frequent accusation both in the press and in individual discussions with students, and is emphasised in the study regarding «Evaluating the education efficiency in the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies», 2006. Most of the complaints received at the Dean’s Office at the Faculty of International Business and Economics regard the excessive bureaucracy both in administrative aspects, as well as the ones about the quality of the teaching process. Out of the 483 respondents from the Faculty of International Business and Economics, class of 2005 – 2006, who took part in a study on quality of services offered by the faculty, most of the complaints were those regarding the organisation

of the administrative system, especially the secretarial ones, and communication between the secretaries and the public. Thus 25.6% of the respondents considered the administrative system too bureaucratic and very badly organised, and 8% emphasised the deficiencies of the secretarial services: “Excessive bureaucracy, while the internet is increasingly used by more and more universities. In the BAES the on-line communication system is terrible” (p. 11). The lack of technology is not an excuse, as the BAES is one of the most technologically endowed and one of the highest in quality universities in Romania. Consequently, it is not the lack of technology or the technical support that causes a lack of efficiency. Like in Japan and Korea, despite the high technology and some global recipes, the employees are connected to their offices by the invisible, but extremely powerful threads of tradition (Ihlwan, 2007). In the same way, in the BAES an old-fashioned administrative and managerial system, without procedures and clear and permanent allocation of responsibilities, creates bottlenecks were the students, the general public and their dissatisfactions meet (Constantin, 2006, p. 13).

According to international best practice, transparency should also be an important and permanent feature of educational activities, . Students nowadays navigate with technical easiness and intellectual opening on diverse internet sites, from renowned universities to research institutes, from companies to training NGO’s or think-tanks from the remotest places on earth. Therefore it is pathetic to ask them to read and reproduce courses and sometimes a minimal outdated bibliography, which reflects the readings of the Professor, and not the status of the respective subject. So it seems that the students’ undeniable lack of interest for studying has a serious cause in the way courses are delivered. Here is a fragment of the questionnaire a FIBE student filled in July 2006. It discusses the quality of teaching: “Students should be encouraged to study a vaster bibliography throughout the semester to encourage discussions on the respective topic during classes. Very few professors had such interactive courses and they were attended with pleasure as they were useful. The process of continuous learning is based greatly, with small exceptions, on learning by heart. Unfortunately we were not encouraged to think.” (Constantin, 2006, p.13).

Therefore we can see that classifications have a potentially positive effect, and this effect will amplify. Moreover, they should trigger quality assurance procedures, as now in Romania. A visible effect is founding The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), as an independent public institution of national interest, a legal entity, with financial independence. Its general mission is to externally evaluate the quality of education in higher education institutions and other providers of programmes of studies and life-long learning specific to tertiary education in Romania (HG 1257/2005).

External evaluation generally entails institutional stress, pressures and, consequently, resistance everywhere. The proposal of the minister of education in

Canberra for the *My University website* made a large number of the Australian academic community to publicly and loudly express their anxiety (Harrison, 2010). This anxiety has been even more evident in Romania where the large number of reforms acting simultaneously on various institutional layers expanded competition among universities to a larger area including research institutes as well. Constantin, 2006, underlines the fact that “the Romanian system of higher education used to emphasise teaching and not research, the research institutes being conceived as competitors for universities (...). Moreover, increasing the quality of higher education and the value of scientific research is a time-costing process, which is influenced by a series of marginal aspects, such as resources” (p. 14). While all this is true and the echoes continue to make headlines in the news, there is also a positive aspect to evaluation and transparency – for Romania there is the opportunity to connect to international standards. Universities will analyse and assess their identity, delimit or redefine their mission and, perhaps most importantly, they will become responsible and transparent towards their stakeholders, especially their students.

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Universities – marketing their image

University sites – BAES. A case study

Another aspect we would like to underline is the difficult and obsolete, highly digressive language that Romanian universities are still using today. Taking the case study of The Bucharest Academy of Economic studies, if one would like to read its mission and vision statements, they would be unable to do that unless they spoke Romanian, as the information requested is not on the English page, with the exception of the slogan “Partners in performance!”.

On the home page in Romanian though, besides the same slogan, there is what we could think is the mission statement: “Academia de Studii Economice din Bucuresti este si doreste sa ramana cea mai prestigioasa institutie de invatamant economic superior si de administratie publica din Romania si sa se califice printre primele universitati din Europa, prin continutul si modernitatea procesului de invatamant, dinamismul inovarii, implicarea in raporturi strategice de parteneriat cu mediul economic si social national si international” (www.ase.ro). In our translation: “The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies is and wishes to remain the most prestigious higher education institution in the areas of economics and public administration in Romania and to classify among the first universities in Europe through the content and modernity of its education process, the dynamism of innovation, involvement in strategic partnerships with the national and international economic and social environments.” Moreover, in one of the documents posted on the site, there are explicit vision and mission statements, which differ somewhat from what can be seen on the home page. Thus, in the document entitled *The BAES development strategy 2007 – 2014*, the vision is: “To be a leader in education and scientific research in the areas of economic, juridical and administrative studies in Romania, and to be one of the most performant universities in Europe” (<http://www.ase.ro/site/Baza%20legislativa/Strategia%20de%20dezvoltare%202007-2014/index.htm>, our translation).

The mission, as described in the same document, “is to create, capitalize and disseminate knowledge, through developing a research and education

environment for the members of the academic community, capable of consolidating its national leadership in education and research, and to place it among the best European universities in the field. The basis of these performances is represented by the formation of a strong academic community, with an organisational culture based on excellence, in which attracting, developing and promoting scientific and teaching values are on the forefront.

The BAES aims to achieve excellence at international standards in research and teaching through:

- forming, developing and disseminating the values of the new economy;
- educating high performance specialists in the areas of economics, law and administration, by offering creative study programmes, which should integrate the results of scientific research and contribute to the students' intellectual development;
- developing the students' intelligent self-governing capacity, based on using the acquired knowledge in the economic and social environments;
- generating competitive qualifications in academic and post-academic training;
- making sustainable partnerships with other academic or business institutions;
- integrating research centres in European excellence networks, and making knowledge-generating fundamental and application research;
- developing teaching staff highly responsible professionally and in civic society;
- promoting performant academic management;
- consolidating the academic community spirit by cultivating responsibility, transparency, equal opportunities and credibility;
- harmonizing and promoting scientific, cultural and ethical values in the regional, national and international community"

(<http://www.ase.ro/site/Baza%20legislativa/Strategia%20de%20dezvoltare%202007-2014/index.htm>, our translation).

Compared with the Harvard Business School mission, expressed in only ten words "We educate leaders who make a difference in the world". (<http://www.hbs.edu/about/>) or of the Haas School of Business de la University of California, Berkeley in only three words "Leading Through Innovation" (<http://www.haas.berkeley.edu/>), we can say that The BAES mission of 248 words is too complicated to be easily remembered. Not only American universities use a hyper-concentrated discourse, fit for the present times and for an audience ready to receive information only in a nutshell, as in advertising slogans, and based on assessing the quality of education and research processes taking place in the respective institution, followed by international acknowledgement and recognition, but also European universities adopt the language of marketing. Thus Judge Business School of the University of Cambridge expresses its mission in 18 words,

INSEAD in seven, and the London School of Economics uses in 48 words both for the mission and the history of the school:

* “Combining academic excellence with practical learning and cutting edge research. Working with businesses and practitioners around the world” (<http://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/>)

* “INSEAD: The Business School for the World” (http://www.insead.edu/discover_INSEAD/welcome/index.htm)

* “The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is a world class centre for its concentration of teaching and research across the full range of the social, political and economic sciences. Founded in 1895 by Beatrice and Sidney Webb, LSE has an outstanding reputation for academic excellence”. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/informationAbout/aboutLSE/Default.htm> (Nicolae, M. Enache, M. 2007, p.7).

We can conclude that on the highly competitive educational markets of today first impressions count more than ever. At the same time, the Erasmus mobility programme has provided many Romanian students with the opportunity to study abroad and to put pressure on their home institution to offer quality services. Erasmus also brought a significant, though much lower, number of European students to study in The BAES, particularly in the Faculties of International Business and Economics and Business Administration, which provide full time tuition in English, French or German. In informal discussions with the international students studying in those faculties, we noticed that they complain not of the lack of comparable resources to their home institutions, as we might have expected, but mainly about the lack of effective institutional communication, the lack of clear, transparent procedures, easily available in international languages. They find it difficult to access information, or they believe there is lack of dynamism in updating the existing information on the university website. One possible explanation for the low quality of information in English and French on the BAES site is the general disregard for language skills in emerging economies. To this, one can add the lack of an adequate management and financial framework to allow the outsourcing of the translation services to commercial organizations which could do a much better job than the university staff which have other duties to perform as well.

The BAES: study of perceptions of the university image

In order to analyse the efficiency of university marketing in the case of The BAES, we distributed a questionnaire (see Annexe) to different stakeholders. In addition, we conducted formal and informal discussions with categories of stakeholders due to their unwillingness to answer the questionnaire. In the end, we were able to process information from 253 people (6 professors, 4 members of the administrative staff, 160 bachelor students and 83 master students). Through this questionnaire we wanted to examine the way in which institutional identity building is received by the interested audience. Unfortunately the response from the teaching

and administrative staff was not encouraging, but the students were incredibly responsive to our request.

The first two questions referred to the extent to which the public think they know The BAES, and the extend to which they think the others do:

1. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is *not at all* and 5 is *extremely well*) how well do think you know the identity of The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies?
2. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is *not at all visible* and 5 is *extremely visible*) how visible to you think the identity of The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies is to its stakeholders (members of the teaching staff, administrative staff, students, etc.)?

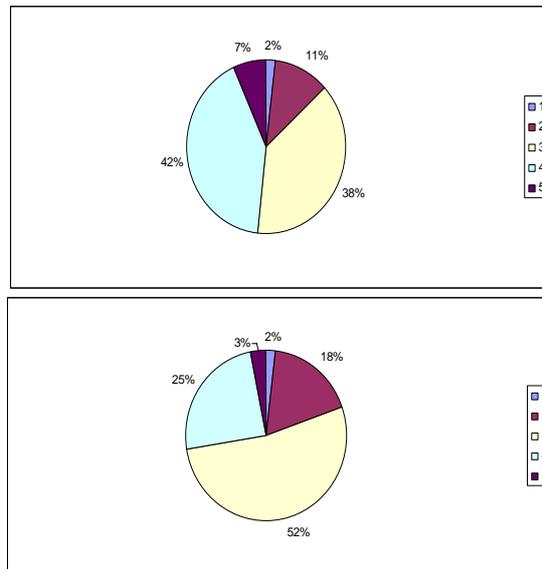


Figure 2 : *The extent to which the identity of The BAES is known by the stakeholders and how they think the others know it.*

The results in Figure 2 show a discrepancy between the extent to which The BAES stakeholders believe they know the identity of this institution and its visibility: if 80 % of the respondents think they know the university identity (with answers 3 and above), only 52 % think institutional identity is visible enough (again 3 and above). The differences between those who marked number 5 (extremely well and extremely visible) is even more emphatic: 52 % and 38 %, whereas at the other end, those who marked 1 (not at all and not at all visible) stays the same, at 2 %. We

did not intent to analyze these answers even deeper, and see who of the stakeholders gave these answers, given that the numbers of members of the teaching and administrative staff was so small, but we can say that the students' answers were comparable (bachelor and master's).

The next question referred to whether the respondents (who as we have seen in great majority believe they know the identity of the institution they study in) correctly identify how this institution wants to be identified by 2014 (as expressed in *The BAES development strategy 2007 – 2014*. As we can see from Figure 3, only 248 (out of 253) answered this question, and most of them (137, that is 55 %) correctly identified that as “a research and teaching university”, with 60 respondents (24 %) saying that they are both in equal measure). Only 38 respondents (15 %) believe that the BAES would like to become a teaching university by 2014, and 9 respondents (4 %), a research university. Only 4 respondents (2 %) believe that the BAES would like to assume neither of the two roles mentioned, but without mentioning any other role! According to *The BAES development strategy 2007 – 2014, the identity is to be* “a university for research and teaching, which organises higher and scientific education in the areas of economics and administrative sciences” (pag. 5, our translation).

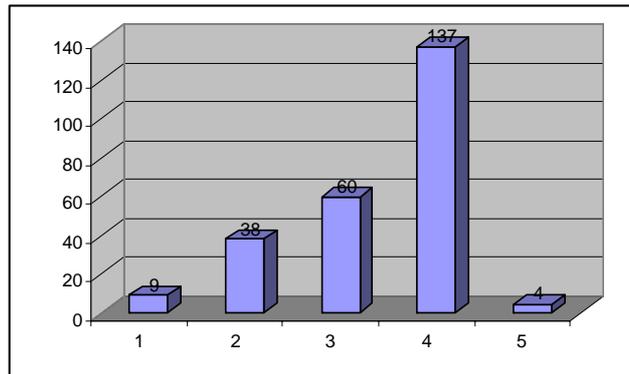


Figure 3 : *Role of The BAES by 2014 as perceived by stakeholders*

To the question whether they know the mission of the BAES, 106 plainly answered no, out of them six admitted having read it, but were unable to remember it! We are not surprised, as we noted above, the mission being a long and confusing paragraph. The rest of the respondents tried to explain the mission in their own words, so they give a large variety of answers, some of them showing the confusion they are in. We note here some in the respondents' own words:

- to be the first economic university in Romania;
- to educate students in economy and accounting and to prepare them for aiding in the upbringing of the global economy;

- to show theoretical aspect of affairs;
- to help students develop necessary cognitive and behavioural competences as to become specialist in an ever more complex and dynamic national and international business environment;
- to create competent people in the economic field;
- to prepare its students for an international economic environment;
- to form professionals with high level of knowledge, etc.

Twenty-five of the respondents more or less gave versions or summarised the correct mission statement: "To remain the most prestigious institution of higher economic education and public administration in Romania and to qualify among the first universities in Europe".

Only 219 people answered the next question: "Have you read the documents that define the strategy of The BAES for the following years?", out of whom, the great majority, 201 (92%, all of them students) honestly answer they haven't. Only 18 (8%, all of the professors and administrative staff and some of the students from both bachelor and master degrees) say they have. When asked to enumerate some of their main points, the answers received vary quite a lot. Here are some of them:

- to develop research;
- to move towards a European system of higher education diplomas and certificates;
- to improve the European system of transformable (sic!) credits;
- strengthening international relations;
- to remain the most prestigious institution of tertiary economic and public administration education in Romania;
- to rank among the leading universities in Europe;
- to develop teaching and research staff of high professional and civic responsibility, etc.

As seen in Figure 4, the website is clearly considered by most (90 %, 216) respondents to be the best means of communication of this strategy, followed by meetings (16 respondents, 1 %) and hard-copy newsletters (only 6 respondents). It becomes thus evident that the website has to be *updated regularly* and to include concise and easy to obtain information in a reader-friendly layout.

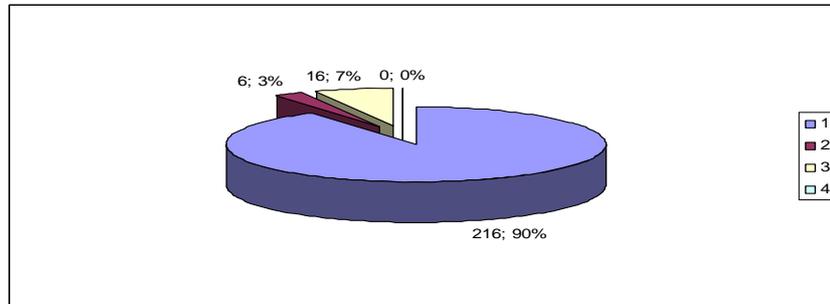


Figure 4 : *Visibility of communication methods: 1: the website, 2: meeting, 3: hard-copy letters, 4: other*

The last question referred to the identity of The BAES as perceived by the respondents, and it gave the following results: most of the answers were divided between those who believe that The BAES is a higher education institution (110) and a university (108), whereas 24 believe there is no difference between the two, and 14 think there is a difference, only they don't know which. Suffice it to mention at this point that the Strategy mentioned above and all the institutional documents identify The BAES with a university. True, its name (Academy) can create confusions.

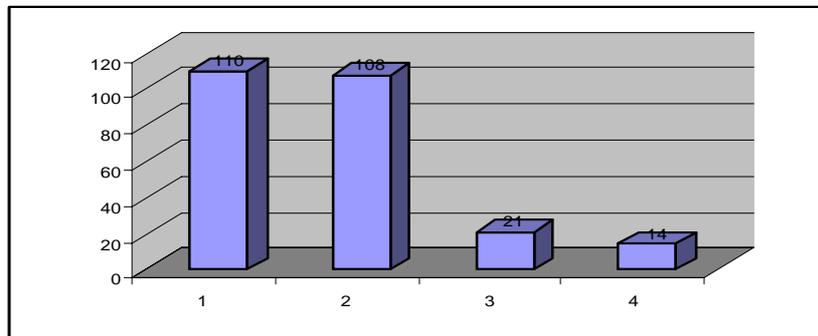


Figure 5 : *Identity of The BAES: 1: a university; 2: a higher education institution; 3: there is no difference between the two; 4: there is a difference, but I don't know which*

Finally, the respondents were invited to write their comments, among which we note some of the positive ones (the language mistakes belong to the respondents, but for authenticity we kept them like that): “The management of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies have to be commended for linking quality assurance measures and endeavours with consistent support given to the professional development of teaching professionals, to the benefit of students, teachers and the institution as a whole. At the same time, all academics at the

Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies involved in professional development programmes deserve special praise for their on-going preoccupation for professional improvement and their genuine interest in facilitating their students' developing relevant competences for their future career"; "The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies is distinguished by being the most prestigious institution of higher economic education and public administration in Romania and makes itself visible through the site and through its reputation", and some of the negative ones, also supplemented by advice respondents gave concerning BAES identity and communication: "I would suggest annual seminars with participants on both sides (students as well as administrative staff and teachers) in order to discuss the main issues of the institutional identity of the Academy and perhaps workshop with future students would also be useful in improving its visibility"; "I consider that the institutional visibility of The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies is a bit poor, because the information of general interest, even if it exists on the ASE's website, is sometimes very hard to find and requires the opening of many search windows on the website of the institution. Also, the fact that these are public documents raise the level of transparency and improves its credibility by helping The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies achieve the objectives set for the coming years".

Conclusion

We have shown in this article the necessity for universities to position themselves on the ever more developed and encompassing global educational markets. It is vital to create an identity for their specific target audience and to communicate it clearly and accurately to all the stakeholders. This can be done mainly with the help of world university classifications/rankings and clear and understandable channels of communication, such as visible and easily identifiable internet sites. The case study we used shows at least one Romanian university, The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, started walking on this difficult road.

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