

Introduction

One of the advantage of Romania's integration in the European Union is the increased opportunities for accelerated growth and even change, adapting to European standards. Structural funds projects aim at *reducing the developmen gaps* tbetween member countries, with the purpose of *economic, legal and socio-cultural harmonization*. This approach is, ultimately, a more general target of ensuring *socio-economic order* in Europe and the EU *to build a homogeneous area* with high standards.

Simultaneously with the accession of Romania to the European Union, funding opportunities that can access are increasing. A new trend has made its presence felt, European financing opportunities for universities. The five universities, members of University Consortium involved in this analysis were selected just for the desire to highlight the "new power" the university can have by collaborating and are partners to achieve common goals

Motivation for choosing this PhD thesis and its novelty

The social impact of the implementation of externally financed projects is an older concern. Since my studentship when I was volunteer and submitted for funding projects to support different categories of deprived persons of Iasi. Initially I worked on various external financing lines such as: Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE TRUST)), UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (ILO), pending the pre-accession and post-accession (structural) funds. The current sociological research is the continuation of the study conducted in the dissertation thesis.

Also, the base of choosing this PhD thesis is also the fact that since January 2011 I am part of the *only project team implemented within the University Consortium which is coordinated by the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi*. The project tile is University Community for quality management in higher education, funded by the European Social Fund by Human Resources Development Programme 2007-2013, coordinated by PhD Nica Panaite. I wanted to bring *a new element making the first research conducted on recipients of doctoral scholarships funded by European Social Fund through the Sectoral Operational Human Resources Development Programme in University Consortia*.

Research period and institutions with whom I have worked

The research conducted in this thesis was carried out at various levels, in different phases, sometimes simultaneously or consecutively, as follows:

- during January - November 2011 I made the collection, compilation and analysis of data from www.fonduri-eu.ro site. Subsequently, I realized the secondary analysis of these data.
- during March - May 2012, I have applied the questionnaire among recipients of SOP HRD scholarships from the universities of the University Consortium (UAIC, UB. ASE, UBB, UVT) - PhD in IInd and IIIrd years and PhDs (SOP HRD scholars first cycle), processing and interpreting the data afterwards.
- in the period December 2011 - June 2012 I have documented and elaborated the case studies presented within this paper.

Throughout the elaboration of thesis I worked with the staff of the following institutions: "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Bucharest University; "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, West University of Timisoara and Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. They supported me in distributing the questionnaire addressed to PhD students in their doctoral schools, the presentation of the problems faced in implementing projects within their institutions etc.

Purposes, objectives and research hypotheses

The *purpose* of the research undertaken in this PhD thesis is to identify, define, describe and analyze the social impact of structural funds absorption in University Consortium. Sociological research will be done through a qualitative and quantitative approach.

In other words, the social impact refers to the following aspects: bidirectional partnership initiatives between universities and SMEs, NGOs respectively, positive social effects of universities in regional development; negative social effects (perverse) occurred with the implementation of Structural Funds projects; benefits of SOP HRD scholarships; employability of PhDs recipients of SOP HRD scholarships.

In order to achieve our research goal of the thesis, the following *objectives* were set as follows:

1. Description of specific elements, theoretical and practical, of the social impact of structural funds (development theories, education theories, ethical issues in the conduct of research, case studies).

2. Presentation of structural funds in Romania with emphasis on historical, taxonomy, principles, European and national regional policy.
3. Analyzing the social implications of adapting national legislation to European standards and the Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013 and presenting social role of Structural Funds in Romanian higher education with a focus on globalization.
4. Description of the social consequences of universities of the University Consortia following implementing of projects in partnership financed from structural funds.

Identifying specific Romanian social attitudes and mentalities regarding the use of structural funds.

Assumptions of this thesis are formulated in several ways, as follows:

1. Number of partnership initiatives from universities to SMEs is directly proportional to the number of partnership initiatives from SMEs to universities (*hypothesis refuted*).
2. Projects implemented by universities where are located lead to the social development of the area? (*hypothesis confirmed*)
3. Doctoral students participating in abroad study mobility publish more scientific articles than those who remained in Romania (*hypothesis refuted*).
4. The main motivation for doctoral students in doctoral research is doctorate scholarship (*hypothesis refuted*).
5. The number of doctoral scientific works is directly proportional to the degree of self-motivation (scientific research) (*hypothesis is confirmed*).
6. Employability of PhD/SOP HRD scholarship recipients increased during doctoral studies? (*hypothesis refuted*).

Thesis structure

The work consists of seven thematic chapters, each analyzing one key issue in the approach taken, and finally is the finished product of my research.

Chapter I. Paper background . Sociological theory and research methodology.

This chapter consists of three subchapters, the first two are focused on sociological theories related to development and education, and the last subchapter is represented by research methodology. In the first subchapter were presented the main sociological theories underlying the effect of Romanian accession into the European Union and how they apply to this thesis. The following theories were presented: the theory of structural differentiation (Smelser), theory of the

development agencies (McClelland), regional development theory (Perroux) and the theory of imitation (Tarde).

In the second subchapter, we present the theories that focus on education doctoral studies and their impact on PhDs. We analyzed the main sociological theories that have implications for education of young people, namely those developed by Durkheim, Berger and Luckmann, Bourdieu.

In the last subchapter, we present the purpose, objectives, hypothesis and methodology of this paper PhD research. I made reference to issues related to sampling and the studied population, the advantages and limitations of online research, ethics during sociological research etc.

Chapter II. Structural Funds - support for social development. History, types, principles.

This chapter consists of five subchapters which address the following topics: EU history, past and present of structural funds and their principles and taxonomy, UE regional policy and cohesion policy for the next programming period, i.e. from 2014 to 2020.

Within this first two subchapters, we presented the history of the EU and European funds with their stages, before reaching their current form and support in social development. We presented the first steps towards decentralization of European Social Fund from European to national level, solutions identified for the aging population, the Lisbon Strategy being a step towards reducing gaps in that period, and regulations adopted to present needs.

In the following two subchapters, three European funds (*European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund*) and two complementary measures (*European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Fisheries Fund*) are presented. We also presented the fifteen principles underlying structural funds, namely: principle of complementarity, principle of coherence, coordination principle, principle of conformity, programming principle, principle of partnership, territorial principle of implementing, the principle of proportional intervention, the principle of joint management, principle of additionality, principle of equality between men and women and non-discrimination, the principle of sustainable development, the principle of reimbursement, the principle of automatic decommitment, the principle of subsidiarity and proportionate intervention.

In the last subchapter, we present the differences between the *Lisbon Strategy* and the *2020 strategy*, the strengths of the new strategies and ways to increase the absorption of European funds for the next 2014-2020 programming period.

Chapter III. Structural Funds in Romania. Social implications.

This chapter consists of four subchapters, two examines the social implications of adapting national legislation to European standards and the Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013. The following two represent the social role of the structural funds in Romanian higher education and issues of globalization and higher education.

In the first subchapter, the two adapted documents are adapted at Romanian level according to EU demands required for structural funds, namely the *National Development Plan and National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013*. We presented the role and levels *Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics*, plus distribution of the eight development regions of Romania.

In the next section, we present the particularities of the Sectoral *Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013*, namely: general objective, specific objectives, the types of projects that can be funded (grants and strategic); priority axes and areas of intervention, focusing on the ones the universities can apply those projects; categories applicants and eligible target groups.

In the next subchapter, were presented the social role of the Structural Funds in Romanian higher education and issues of globalization and higher education, with focus on the social impact of these two factors on higher education.

Chapter IV. University consortium and social influences of structural funds.

The chapter is composed of five subchapters which present social influences of structural funds in the University Consortia. I focused on the following subsections: presentation of five universities in the University Consortia, social consequences of universities, existing partnerships in university network and state of SOP HRD projects funded by the Consortium.

The first two subchapters present the laws and definitions of terms used (partnership, partner, consortium) and presenting each university member of the University Consortium and a scheme of projects from structural funds accessible to them.

The next subchapter presents affiliations with international organizations and universities positioning in different national or world rankings with regard to the social consequences of these actions.

The last two subchapters highlight partnerships within Consorțiului, advantages and disadvantages of European project partners and beneficiaries. Are presented all projects contracted until November 20, 2011 by the five institutions of SOP HRD financing line and existing correlations in which universities have the role of partner or applicant for various

projects. We presented in detail each university, who are partners in projects on which universities have the role of beneficiary and and vice versa. We concluded this subchapter by presenting the share value of doctoral scholarships projects at universities in the University Consortium.

Chapter V. Social attitudes and mentalities on absorption and use of structural funds.

This chapter consists of five subchapters, of which the first four address issues such as perceptions of social disparities of social development of domestic space; social effects (positive and negative) of accessing structural funds social; social causes and perceptions about the boom of educated graduates doctoral in our country. We conducted a brief overview of how social disparities were seen during forty-eighters up to so far. We presented positive social effects of universities in social and regional development. We have also shown negative effects (perverse) of social development throughout history and those of projects from EU funds.

The last chapter includes a presentation of five case studies by which I want to highlight the social impact of structural fund projects, bureaucratic problems with which the beneficiaries of these projects are faced and local attitudes that influence absorption.

Chapter VI. Sociological research on social image of doctoral scholarships projects among PhDs.

In this chapter we presented the results of the sociological survey based on a questionnaire conducted among recipients of doctoral scholarships at universities in the University consortium. The main results of the research were focused on the following themes: participation in scientific opportunities through structural funds, scientific publications made with the support of European funding and ranking of universities, international professional mobility opportunities through structural funds, the motivation to continue doctoral studies, labor market status of scholars of structural funds in conjunction with the *European Employment Strategy*, the significance of the title of doctor for the first class of SOP HRD fellows and difficulties encountered during the course of doctoral studies.

Chapter VII. Instead of closing.

In the last chapter we organized and presented solutions of PhDs from the University consortium for improving doctoral activity. We presented trinomial future - education, research and service to the community. We have also shown the limits of research, contributions to research and future research directions.

Research methodology

In order to include the phenomenon studies, is mandatory to complement known techniques and strategies, because each technique gives us a data set with a certain value and function, against which you can the conclusions and research proposals can be drawn. In this context, research techniques used to confirm/refute hypotheses and research objectives are:

- Bibliographic documentation
- Sociological questionnaire survey-based,
- Secondary analysis of data,
- Participant observation,
- Case study

In this thesis we made treaties analysis, research reports, monographs, studies, websites, specialized magazines, yearbooks, newspapers, books, doctoral theses, statistical reports, dictionaries, relevant legislation on the topic. Bibliographic documentation was done *in order to validate research both in terms of content* by validating the fundamental concepts made in relation to the meanings assigned by the literature and *in the formal sense*, by means of a empirical-theoretical validation through on fundamental literature ideas and their analysis and interpretation and general ideas, as an *interdisciplinary approach*.

We used an **opinion questionnaire**, with mixed questions, self-administered. I enjoyed using current technology, loaded the questionnaire on an electronic platform available for free on the internet and I sent a link to direct respondents to the online questionnaire, respectively doctoral students / doctors in universities members of University consortium, respectively ASE, UAIC, UB, UBB and UVT.

Secondary data analysis was to synthesize existing information regarding the five universities and making correlations between projects implemented by these ones to achieve the objective of this thesis.

Participant observation was used from two points of view - one of SOP HRD doctoral scholarship recipients within one university of the University consortium and employee in a project management department - structural funds involved in writing and implementing several projects funded by European Social Fund as assistant manager, long-term or short-term expert.

Instrumental case study was used, studying projects implemented by structural funds within universities of University consortium, highlighting the target group, the social impact of the results expected to be achieved at the end of each project and implementation problems, especially those related to social attitudes.

Instead of closing

Respondents proposed solutions to reduce difficulties along doctoral studies in order to achieve the first step in improving doctoral scholarships system in Romania. We want very much to reach European standards with also the PhD system, the minimum requirement is to adapt our system to existing requirements in Romania, to customize; otherwise we risk doing more harm than good. Hoping for good summarizing of the responses of respondents and their communication to stakeholders, we want to believe that something useful can be done for doctoral system, and in a few years to reach standards abroad. The proposed solutions are:

- *extension and/or the existence of possible extension of the study period lasting up to 4 years.*
- *reducing bureaucracy and improving communication at the institutional level.*
- *deepening practical activities during the study and introduction of mandatory participation in international mobility stages.*
- *improving and tightening the criteria for admission to doctoral studies and measurement of current PhD performance and of future PhDs to be higher than they are today.*
- *PhD thesis respondents consider that it should be more concise, not to have a huge number of pages and be useful for research and, not least, to be a practical approach in areas of the labor market.*
- *organization of more writing academic courses and support to publish articles or even including it as an optional course during PhD period.*
- *change or improve curricular area in the first year of study.*
- *assist doctoral students during research period.*
- *upgrading educational infrastructure.*
- *creating a brochure containing information about the PhD (admission, steps, distance, where you can register for conferences, who can call) or meetings with doctoral IInd or IIIrd year for a kind of mentoring.*
- *PhD students involvement in conferences can be a solution for solving many problems, such as providing opportunities for publication, serious approach and quality of the event, getting half-yearly credits.*
- *create research groups among doctoral students.*
- *a more active involvement of scientific doctoral tutors, teachers and staff working in different departments of universities.*

- the existence of a *large number of doctoral coordinators to be closer to doctoral student age*, so being able to spend more time on each student individually.
- *expanding partnerships/collaborations with universities, research centers, private and public institutions in Romania and abroad and mobility mediation or internship*
- *support doctoral candidates in initiating approach to achieve joint degrees doctoral theses.*

Out of the desire to maintain competitive advantage in educational services addressed to the community and recognition of qualifications awarded by studies diplomas and certificates on labor market, universities will intensify, and even will diversify dialogue with representative actors involved in the social development of the community. With regard to doctoral study programs, will be reviewed in the light of the relationship between theoretical knowledge and development of intervention practical skills and resolution of cases more or less defined. PhD students involvement in organizing scientific events, participation in competitions for doctoral grants, mobility study programmes can be reorganized so as to contribute to the training of future specialists or even future scientists.

We want to continue this process by deepening the theme in post-doctoral studies we intend to achieve in the next period and even application of research projects aimed at benchmarking the impact of structural funds in public and private universities in Romania and over abroad.

Future research

Elaborating this research I discovered aspects that we have not considered initially and want to deepen in the following research. We want to do a comprehensive analysis of the role of EU funds on universities in Romania and to identify the percentage that universities have absorbed of total ESF allocations, what brought extra.

Also, we want to achieve a scenario on universities, with and without European funding projects, in order to have the general picture on the advantages and/or disadvantages of these European funds. We want that by the new projects submitted for funding on EU funds, to be able to create larger networks for providing places of practice for students and the implementation of the recommendations offered by respondents to the conducted research.

We can not exclude the intention and desire to succeed by these future analysis to provide solutions to reduce bureaucracy and so that we can use the example of Poland to increase absorption across the country, not only by universities, but also by public institutions, SMEs and NGOs.