

CHAPTER 8

Academic centralization in Romania until World War II: Forging an elite university in the capital city of Bucharest and the reactions of the competing University of Iasi

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Abstract

This paper presents, on the one hand, the attempts made by the Romanian central authorities starting with the second half of the nineteenth century to transform the University of Bucharest (founded in 1864) into a favoured, elite one for the Romanians living in the country or abroad, in a context of centralizing tendencies, and, on the other hand, the rather anaemic reactions of the competing university. As the higher education institutions were funded from an always insufficient budget, this special attention meant at the same time depriving the first Romanian university, the University of Iasi (founded in 1860), of the necessary funds for an appropriate functioning. The separation made between the two universities and the underfunding of the one in Iasi violated not only the legislation, but also the negotiations made with a view to the achievement of the Union (1859) of the two Romanian medieval states, Moldavia and Walachia, and to the creation of Romania; these negotiations had stipulated on the establishment of the new state's capital at Bucharest but also, in order to balance the situation, the

strengthening of the cultural and educational institutions of Iasi.

Key words: Academic centralization, Elite/minor universities, University of Bucharest, University of Iasi, Inequitable funding

Introduction

Though it could not stand comparison with the western and central European benchmark universities, the University of the capital city of Bucharest became, in just a few decades after its establishment (1864), an elite university for the Romanians living home or abroad. But that special attention the institution enjoyed in the context of some policies of centralization, disturbed the already fragile academic institutional equilibrium of the country, because the competing university of Iasi (at the same time the first Romanian university, created in 1860), was now underfunded and put on the back burner; this process started in the seventh decade of the nineteenth century and went on all through the interwar period.

The paper has three main objectives. First, to investigate the concrete domestic conditions in which the University of Bucharest became an elite university and, implicitly, the university of choice when it came to public budget. Second, to reveal the mechanisms by which it was possible to overlook the University of Iasi, though it was not only against the legal principle of the equality of treatment, but also against the political agreements that provided the city of Iasi with a greater cultural and educational role, in order to actually offset the fact that the capital was established to Bucharest in 1862. Finally, to show the reactions of the milieu of Iasi to the financial/legal inequities and the extent to which these reaction managed to slow down or to stop the mentioned process.

The decision-makers of that time did not have either the resources or the will to develop the two universities to the same extent, though the extra money for the university of Bucharest came from the higher education budget, so it should have been, theoretically, evenly distributed. This process by which the University from the

capital city grew stronger and stronger and the one of Iasi, implicitly, became increasingly weaker took place gradually, over decades, and was favoured by the lack of an adequate, powerful and opportune reaction from the intellectual elite of the city of Iasi.

The biased treatment the University of Bucharest enjoyed, explained by the necessity to get quickly closer to the elite universities from the European capitals, did not obey either the spirit or the letter of the law, which was treating the two institutions fairly. This differentiation was actually totally against the spirit in which the negotiations and agreements were made between the elites of Moldavia and those of Wallachia when targeting the 1859 Union and the making of Romania. On the contrary, these agreements had included the idea of strengthening the cultural role of Iasi, the old capital of Moldavia, in reward for the economic, social, political and symbolic losses resulted from the establishment of the new state's capital city in Bucharest; but these agreements were quickly ignored and violated by the central decision-makers.

The legislation provided the University of Iasi with competences and authority in the field of education (the organization of the baccalaureate, of the competitions for the occupation of teaching positions, etc.) in the north of the country (Moldavia), while the University of Bucharest had the same responsibilities in the south (Walachia); also, both universities were reserved an equal number of scholarships for the students of Letters and Sciences, which were less attractive faculties than Law or Medicine, and where the future teachers necessary for public education were going to come from. This dual organization at a theoretical level, treating both institutions in an equal manner, would be left behind quite soon in practice, by an excessive centralization (including that of education) and, as already mentioned, by paying special attention to the University of Bucharest.

Compared to the misdemeanours of the central administration, favouring the University of the capital, the public reactions of the academia and of the intellectual milieu of Iasi, even if they were not absent, came out rather late and timidly. One reason for that was that this centralising policy in the field of higher education was infiltrated progressively, by small steps, especially due to the vote in

the Parliament for the establishment of new priority chairs at the University of Bucharest; after each such episode of differential treatment, the academics of Iasi hoped it was the last one and the Centre would balance their policies in the future. But the main reason of their reserve was related to the fear of being blamed for absence of patriotism, for lack of “love for the nation”, for endangering the 1859 Unification, for separatist propaganda. In the interwar period there were cases of academics from Iasi who were too opinionated about the excessive centralization in the field of education and culture, and that was a reason for them to come to the attention of central bureaucracy.

The Romanian society's modernization process and the establishment of the universities of Iasi (1860) and Bucharest (1864)

In the mid-nineteenth century the Romanians pass through a process of modernization, a very interesting one, at least for the fact that its promoters are youth coming from the social/political elite, who played against their own interest: they were not supposed to be interested in change, as this could endanger their social positions. In spite of the social interests and sometimes even against their own families, this generation of young people educated especially in France (Paris), but also in Germany, young men that the society called “bonjourists” (because of their French fashion dressing and conduct habits), pushed the Romanian society forward, closer to the Western one, like no other generation ever had.

It is equally true that the internal and international political context gave a new impetus, a sudden current of optimism regarding the future evolution of the Romanian society. With the French support of Napoleon III and due to the double election, in January 1859, of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the elective assemblies from Iasi and Bucharest made the unification of the two Romanian states, Moldavia and Walachia at that time under the Ottoman suzerainty and under the protectorate of the Great Powers.

Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, a former student in Paris, was an acknowledged Francophile and a faithful adept of the application

of the French model in Romania. Among other things, he wanted the Romanian young men willing to study abroad to go exclusively to Paris, where they were supposed to be hosted in a special institute, established and funded by the Romanian state; closely supervised over their studies, these young people were then going, upon their return home, to implement in the Romanian society the French values and models, as close to the original as possible, and thus to contribute in a decisive manner to Romania's transformation and modernization¹.

Furthermore, things had started to change fundamentally before 1859, and the increasingly pronounced promotion of a meritocratic social paradigm encouraged the access to higher education. The authorities in the Union period took over and amplified a current that had existed before as well, i.e. granting stipends to worthy young men in order to study abroad. This policy reached its climax just when the two universities were established and the training of specialists capable to teach the "lights of sciences" was attempted.²

One of the results of this struggle for modernization and for the imitation, in terms of form and of essence, of the West, was the emergence of the institution of the university, first in Iasi in 1860, then in Bucharest, in 1864. It is interesting that in the Romanian cultural milieu the concept of University missed almost completely from public debate. The debate started quite suddenly and it got materialized in just a few months, in the autumn of 1860, by the establishment of the University of Iasi. The 1860 process could also be considered an exotic one, deprived of local traditions and of clear public support, sprinkled with tragic-comical episodes; such an episode was that whose main character was Professor Nicolae Ionescu, a fierce critic, in the written media, of the idea to establish

1. For more details about the Romanian students abroad in the period when the Romanian universities were founded, about their roles in modernization and about the project of Prince Cuza, see Leonidas Rados 2010 and 2011.

2. Some of these young men, future university professors at Iasi or at Bucharest, were initiated during their studies in different secret, masonic societies, which can partially explain their determination and coherence in certain social, political and intellectual projects. See Sturdza 1973, although not all of his conclusions are acceptable.

a University and who, shortly after, was in the list of the University's first professors (and the only one without an adequate academic degree).

In the Romanian area, a more popular form was the academy (combining secondary studies with a kind of higher studies), developed on the pattern of the Greek high schools that had been established in Bucharest and Iasi under the Phanariot regime and under the Greek influence, called Princely Academies³. Until the appearance of the two universities, in Iasi had functioned *Academia Mihăileană* [Michaelian Academy], and in Bucharest *Academia Sf. Sava* [St Sabbas Academy], where both secondary and higher courses were taught, the latter in faculties such as Law and Philosophy.

In a recent study, Florea Ioncioaia analyses theoretically the issue of the university's origins, as a new institution in the Romanian public area and particularly of the University of Iasi, remarking that the effort of the 1860 founders "could seem today a *romantic myth*, given its voluntarist, courageous, hazardous even, character, and at any rate broken away from the imaginary of the time". Furthermore, he notices that the meaning of the term "university" differed from one founder to the other, though the German concept, mainly characterized by autonomy, seems to have eventually won⁴.

In fact, the authorities opted for a certain French orientation in organizing the universities, while the teaching staff preferred the German model. What resulted from it was a rather ineffective hybrid product at the beginning; consequently, the professors of Iasi were in open conflict with the government in the very first years after the establishment of the University, thus endangering the credibility and even the existence of the institution. Furthermore, the public debates of the time included numerous such references to the Franco-German influences and to the combined and less functional nature of Romanian higher education.

Leaving behind the exoticism of the 1860 moment, the establishment of the university had a well-known reason in that period,

3. See the brilliant work of Camariano-Cioran 1974.

4. Ioncioaia 2010, p. 14.

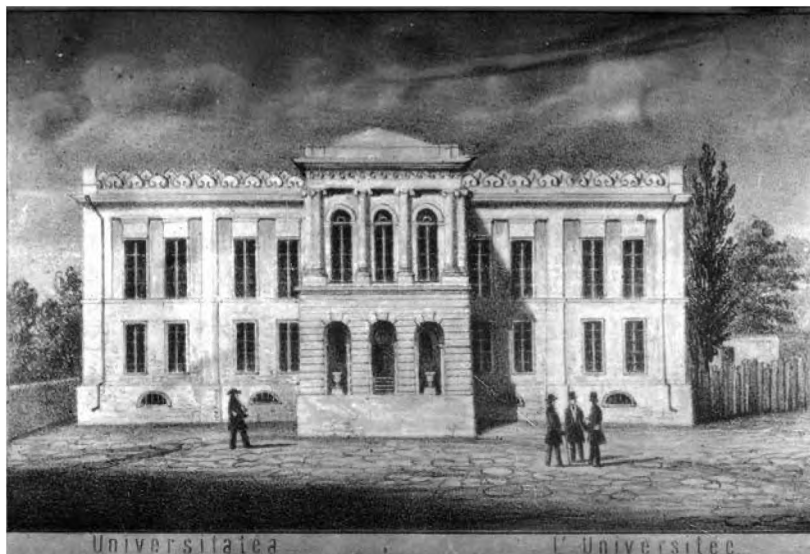


FIGURE 1: The first building of the University of Iasi (1860). Image from the second half of the 19th century.

which was forgotten or ignored by the historians of the university to a great extent. It was obviously not a whim of Prime Minister Mihail Kogălniceanu, a very influential intellectual and politician, and even less one of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza; and it was not an accidental fact in the logic of the modernization process either.

The founding gesture finds its explanation in the 1859 Unification of the two Romanian principalities, a moment when it became clear for the elite that the city of Iasi, old capital of Moldavia, had to renounce its privileged status. In 1862 indeed, the new state of Romania established its capital at Bucharest, a city with a better geo-strategic position, which had been by then the capital of Wallachia, while the historic path of the city of Iasi, which was losing its political (and implicitly its economic, social, symbolic/sentimental) role, got abruptly modified. That is why some of the intellectuals and of the politicians thought about a kind of “specialization” of the two cities, an idea that was tacitly or publicly approved by the contemporaries. As Bucharest became the political and economic capital of the new state, Iasi was supposed to turn into a capital of

schools, of culture, of higher and special studies. The establishment of the University of Iasi was part of this philosophy of compensations.

Kogălniceanu, one of the architects of the 1859 Union and the “little co-founder” of the University of Iasi, as he liked to speak about himself, remembered two decades later the efforts of the local elite to identify correct forms of compensation, explaining the genesis of the institution by the very paradigm of damage control and of the apparently difficult future:

“Instead of the princely palace, let us raise the palace of science, instead of the prince, let us place intelligence, instead of great administrative, financial, military authorities that have to be transferred let us place the high school, the faculties; instead of the government of Iasi let us raise the University of Iasi”⁵.

Naturally, this dualism that provided the city of Iasi with an accentuated cultural/academic role proved to be utopian, considering that the adopted political model was a strongly centralized one. Furthermore, by centralization an attempt was made to unify the traditions in the two Romanian medieval states, to erase the old differences and to build a unitary state, inhabited by a modern nation, built up on European values.

In the autumn of 1860 the University of Iasi was indeed created, but in the first years it lived a tormented life, because of an institutional blockage and of the lack of communication with the Ministry of Public Education. And, as the budget was made by the government of Bucharest and approved by the Parliament of Bucharest, the demands for new chairs, meant to update and to improve the curricula, were most of the times blocked “because of lack of funds”.

In this complicated climate, the cultural and political milieu of the capital city, which was hesitating anyway, from the very beginning, about the establishment of a university in Iasi, wanted its own university that could illustrate the centralist policy in the field of public education as well. And they had it, as in 1864 the University

5. Kogălniceanu 1877, p. 6.

of Bucharest was founded, ratified then, in the same year, by the new Law of Public Education⁶.

The list of the Romanian universities, state universities each and every one, funded from the central budget, was completed after 1919, when Romania obtained territories such as Transylvania and North Bukovina, with the universities of Cluj (initially a Hungarian one) and Chernivtsi (initially a German one).

Forms of inequity and reactions of the academic milieu of Iasi

Not long after the creation of the University of Bucharest, the one of Iasi became a provincial university, and the one in the capital city, *ipso facto*, became a central, elite university for the Romanians living in the country or abroad. In fact, it was naïve to believe that the bureaucrats in the new capital could accept the idea of equal treatment for the two universities or that in the long term they would apply that political project (a utopia, in the context of a centralized state) to create a two-headed structure meant to calm down the sceptics about the Union of the two Romanian Principalities: Bucharest as a political and economic centre, Iasi as a centre of culture, education and science.

On the one hand, the city of Iasi decayed rather quickly in the second half of the nineteenth century; it became a province, and this could be seen in the academic life as well. On the other hand, with the last resources, though economically weakened, Iasi continued to represent, for at least several decades, Romania's most fertile cultural pole; however, it fed on past realities. Here was founded, in the 1860s, a famous literary society called "Junimea", which played a significant role in the crystallization and polishing of the Romanian culture; famous literary names performed here, such as the "national" poet Mihai Eminescu, the story teller Ion Creangă, to-

6. Art. 294 announced that "there are 4 types of faculties: philosophy and letters, law, medicine and physical, mathematical and natural sciences", while art. 295 that "More faculties being established in a place shall form a university". See the 1864 Law of Public Education, in Ministerul Instrucțiunii Publice și al Cultelor 1901, p. 24.



FIGURE 2: The University of Bucharest. Image from the beginning of the 20th century.

gether with scholars from the field of sciences. It is equally true that the future was predictable: Bucharest attracted the intellectual elite like a magnet, and at some point the latter chose the capital over the city of Iasi.

In 1864 the real problems actually started for the first modern university of Romania, the University of Iasi. A term for comparison was emerging, which had not existed before, while the budget meant for higher education had to be now shared so that two institutions could be fed, not only one; hence, the lack of resources. Compared to the University of Iasi, the one of Bucharest was granted, at a fast pace, more chairs in order to complete the number of specializations, a numerous teaching staff was hired, and abundant funds were received for the acquisition of books for the library, for laboratory equipment, for reparations, etc. In order to explain the deviations from the spirit and the letter of the law, the first argument was that the capital city of Romania cannot compete with other European capitals without a university, given that all European capitals, from Paris, Berlin, Vienna to Turin (then Rome) and Athens had such an institution.

Furthermore, the very reality, the deep, objective one, supported the development of the University of Bucharest. Especially after the establishment here of the capital city for the unified state, a dynam-

ic and prosperous economic environment developed here, a much more cosmopolite one than in Iasi. The institution benefited from generous donations from the wealthy citizens and the recruitment of students took place fluently, without breaks, an aspect that became visible in the accelerated increase of the student population. At the other pole, the University of Iasi, placed in an economically weakened and disadvantaged area, without political protection, had to make special efforts in order to get a student population that could allow it to justify its existence.

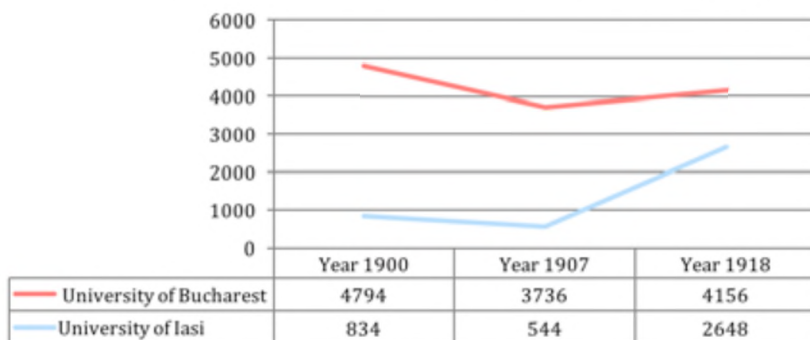
Consequently, by the early 20th century the differences in terms of academic population and graduates had become huge. By 1906, for instance, there had been 6,386 young graduates in the country, of whom 5,394 had graduated from the University of Bucharest (86.46%) and only 992 from the University of Iasi (13.54%), as we can see in Table 1. It is true that this disproportion tends to decrease before and during WWI, but still, the University of Bucharest keeps on attracting a higher number of students (see Diagram 1).

Table 1: Graduates of the two universities until 1906

Faculties	University of Bucharest	University of Iasi
Law	2902	449
Letters and Philosophy	427	175
Science	267	142
Medicine	867	226
Pharmacology	651	-
Theology	278	-
Total	5394	992

Source: Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice [Ministry of Cults and Public Education] 1906, p. 237.

Diagram 1
Student population of the two universities 1900-1918



Source: Anuarul statistic al României [Romania's Statistics Annual], 1912 (p. 465-467) and 1922 (p. 290-292)

But even before the appearance of the “sister” university in the capital city, the University of Iasi could see how obstructive the centre was, the first actions dating from its establishment, in the autumn of 1860. At that time, the physician Carol Davila, a French citizen settled in Bucharest, where he founded an interesting School of Medicine whose students attended a few semesters in the country and then were going abroad to finish their studies and to pass the doctorate, convinced Prince Cuza in the last minute that the University of Iasi should not include a Faculty of Medicine, but limit itself to Theology, Philosophy (with the sections of Letters and of Sciences, which would become faculties in 1864) and Law. Davila was afraid that the students might prefer the medical studies of Iasi and that his School in Bucharest, which had already established relations with the academic and medical system of France, might become useless.

Meanwhile, in 1864 the University of Bucharest was founded, which was supposed to include in its structure, according to the law of the same year, four faculties: Law, Sciences, Letters-Philosophy and Medicine. In fact, the Medical Faculty of Bucharest began to function a few years later, in 1869, when the budget was approved. The functioning of the Medical Faculty of Iasi, on the other hand,

was postponed because of the lack of founding until 1879, almost two decades after the establishment of the University.

It is true that at Iasi had also functioned a Faculty of Theology, but this one was dissolved by the law of 1864, which limited the number of faculties to the four above⁷. Furthermore, ignoring the legislation, in the middle of the ninth decade of the nineteenth century, at the University of Bucharest was organized a Faculty of Theology attended by several dozens of students. It is interesting that the Faculty had from the beginning temporary professors, paid from the budget of the ministry, but a Regulation only appeared in 1888, and the official inclusion in the academic body of the University was made by means of a special law only in 1890. Therefore, while the Faculty of Theology of Iasi was dissolved immediately after the publication of the 1864 Law in the *Official Gazette*, that of Bucharest was established actually against the legislation in force at that time.

As the main form of discrimination of the University of Iasi was the vote for chairs at the University of Bucharest, the reactions were at the beginning very weak. Several situations of that kind were necessary in order for the inhabitants of Iasi to accept the idea that things were going to a wrong and uneven direction. An interesting case occurred in 1877, when V.A. Urechia, former professor of the University of Iasi, then starting with 1864 of the University of Bucharest (and future Minister of Education in 1881-1882) put forward in the Deputies Assembly the creation of three new chairs for the University of Bucharest, dedicated to some personalities of the Acadimia (Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, Alexandru Odobescu, Titu Maiorescu), invoking the necessity to get closer to the level of the faculties from the "civilized states". He was interrupted by a voice in the room, probably that of an intellectual from Iasi, who summarised an increasingly frequent reality: "only in Bucharest, not in Iasi". V.A. Urechia's reply was symptomatic for the subsequent evolution of things: "there is no doubt the next year" will be the turn of the University of Iasi. George Mârzescu, Professor of Law in Iasi (just like others, he would transfer to Bucharest by the end of his

7. About the foundation and the dissolving of this Faculty, see Rados 2012.

career) asked then for an equivalent measure for Iasi. Urechia's proposition was adopted with applauses, and that of Mârzescu did not get the votes⁸, a situation resembling other situations from the past and which would repeat in the future.

With the inequitable funding, a chain reaction started: the University of Iasi was late in completing its curricula with the necessary chairs and was losing thus the basis of student natural recruitment, as an important part of the young people in the area were choosing the capital as a destination for studies, given that besides the well-funded university, there were also bigger career opportunities. Hence a small student population over the first decades; this meant good arguments for those who believed that the establishment of the University of Iasi was a danger for the centralizing processes and wanted this to be dissolved, or, as a form of concession to the province (Moldavia), to be transformed into a branch of the University of Bucharest.

The first public reaction that went beyond the usual timidity occurred in 1877 and was due to Miltiade Tzony, Professor of Mathematics at the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Iasi and former grant holder in Paris. The context was quite complicated; he was responding attacks by Mihail Kogălniceanu, President of the Senate at the time, against a number of professors from Iasi (and older political enemies) transpiring from an interpellation to the minister of Public Education about the "condition of intellectual and even material degradation of the University of Iasi"⁹. Tzony's reaction

8. See the Official Gazette of Romania 30 January 1877 (meeting of the Assembly of Deputies from 20 January 1877), p. 720. In fact, Mârzescu was consistent. He asked for the creation in Iasi of a second chair of civil law, based on the model of Bucharest. An unidentified voice from the room then shouted "next year", and the budget committee rejected the amendment. See the Official Gazette of Romania 1 February 1877 (meeting of the Assembly of Deputies from 20 January 1877, continuation), pp. 752-754.

9. Undoubtedly, Kogălniceanu's objectives, as he was in the opposition, were first of all political; he targeted the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolae Ionescu, who was also a Professor of the University of Iasi since its foundation, and who was more present in Bucharest, in the Parliament or in the government, than in Iasi. Yet, his criticism was objective and coherent on the whole, especially that his role as a founder could be easily forgotten by the contemporaries. After a visit he paid, in

was rather angry, and besides the controversy he was having with his adversary, he adopted an ironic and hostile tone against central bureaucracy as well; furthermore, he betrayed a state of tension and frustration as far as the University of Bucharest was concerned.

Professor Tzony was defending both his colleagues, criticized for neglecting their chair in favour of a political career, and the adjunct professors, suspected of incompetence. He was accusing Kogălniceanu of having done actually nothing after 1860, from the political positions he occupied over time in the capital city, for the institution he had founded, and of having showed no public interest for the fate of the university. He took over Kogălniceanu's remark that the University of Iasi remained the only glory of Moldavia, but went further by thanking the centre for the generosity "showed to everything that once belonged to the city of Iasi". But more important is the fact that Tzony understood the danger hidden in the gesture of his opponent of treating the two universities, out of political reasons, differently, of making a separation between the two in the public mindset:

"Surrounded by an intelligent population, fond of the spirit lights, but deprived of means and mixed up with too many foreign elements, struggling with everybody's inertia and mainly with the indifference of the state, often with the latter's manifest opposition, the University of Iasi has done everything they could to contribute, within the limits of the weak means it has, to increasing common prosperity, by raising the people's intellectual level. We cannot therefore accept the attempt

the winter of 1877, at the University of Iasi, which he found "emptied of professors and students", he declared to be sincerely worried by the evolution of the institution. He thought that the root of this "evil" could only be the 1866 Constitution, which provided the teaching staff with total political liberty and which allowed for the "militant politics to enter the University". From his perspective, the university was confronted, on the one hand, with the professors' absenteeism (as many of them were involved in politics and had to be in the Government and in the Parliament, leaving substitute teachers in their places), and on the other hand with the danger to lose students in favour of the University of Chernivtsi, a German university founded in 1875 by the Austro-Hungarian government, at Romania's north border, therefore not very far from Iasi. See Kogălniceanu 1877, p. 7.

that is being done to separate, in the core of a nation, the two sister-universities, by placing our efforts, love, devotion for the public interest lower than the ones of our fellows from Bucharest.”¹⁰

Furthermore, he observed that all the forums were insistently requiring the University of Iasi to oppose the “policy of Germanization” led by the University of Chernivtsi, but provided no necessary funds. It is significant that whereas the University of Chernivtsi was completely equipped, having, since its foundation, 58 chairs and some new ones to be created, the University of Iasi, despite the repeated solicitations, had almost half the number after 17 years of existence¹¹.

Even though, here and there, Tzony’s discourse was transpiring a pathos that, like in other cases, caused the University of Iasi, in the middle and the long run, more harm than good¹², the Professor was concluding in an ironic note, by actually mocking the claim of the Centre to support science and culture in Iasi, while actually continuing centralization at Bucharest:

“How ironic, how ridiculous! Where are the reforms they made, where are the improvements they brought about? The budgets for 1877 were voted without us seeing any measure that could eradicate or at least decrease the harm. On the contrary, the University of Bucharest gained some more chairs”¹³.

10. Tzony 1877, pp. 33-34.

11. Tzony 1877, p. 68.

12. For instance, he showed that everybody criticizes the University of Iasi, but nobody recorded the “unstable and painful” history of this “unfortunate school”, whose mission was to defend north Romanianism, nobody showed “how many tempests it went through, how much bad will, how much opposition, how much inertia it opposed from all directions; how all the regimes, one after the other, without exception, were only preoccupied by attacking it, only competing in mutilating it; how each and every one of them, unable to finish it with violence, measured its air, its life, with economy, with parsimony, even with avarice, to make it die of anaemia”. Tzony 1877, p. 73.

13. Tzony 1877, p. 74.

Diagram 2
The teaching staff of the two universities 1883-1913



Source: Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice [Ministry of Cults and Public Education] 1883 (pp.106-110), 1902 (pp. 25-34), 1908 (326-340), 1910 (366-382), 1913 (339-356).

Besides the harsh reality of the underfinancing and the small number of approved chairs (for a comparative situation of the teaching staff of the two universities, see Diagram 2), there was an even greater danger threatening the existence of the University of Iasi in the second half of the 19th century, that is, the projects of unification of the two universities, supported sometimes by former professors of the University of Iasi, such as the famous Titu Maiorescu, the main founder of the “Junimea” Society.¹⁴ These projects were obviously advantaging the University of Bucharest, which continued to be funded, while the University of Iasi was to be limited to a mere

14. In his mandates as a Rector of the University of Iasi, Maiorescu continuously militated for the strengthening of the institution, for the approval of new chairs, for a bigger autonomy and an increasing state funding. But he radically changed his opinion after the conflicts with some professors from Iasi and after he moved to Bucharest, in the middle of the eighth decade, as a Minister of Education, as well as a professor and Rector of the University of Bucharest. One of the first tough measures he took as a minister of Public Education was to abolish, under the Budget of 1876, with no public explanations, the Conservatory of Iasi, the first school of the kind in the country (established in 1860). It is true that the next minister re-established the Conservatory in August 1876. About this episode and the reaction of the director, see Aurescu 1906, p. 181-185.

branch of the University of the capital city, keeping only the Faculty of Letters that was anyway not able to give the complex elites that the society and state needed.

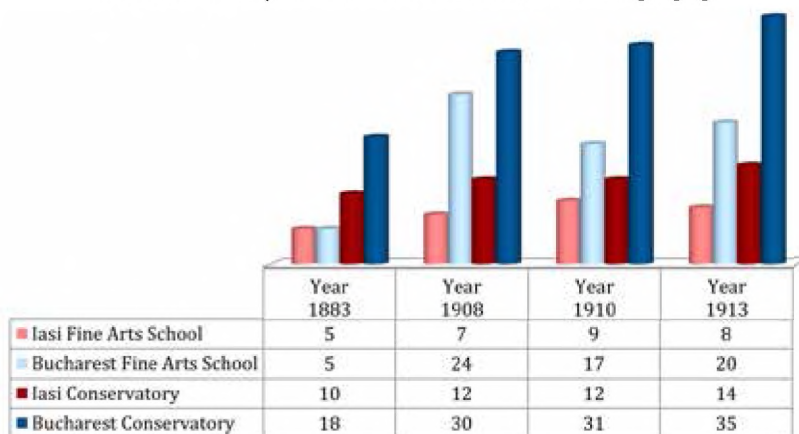
Even if the local reaction was, on the whole, a feeble one, it sometimes managed to stop the misdemeanours of the Centre. Maybe the most coherent local public movement took place in Iasi in 1900, when the Petre P. Carp Cabinet wanted to reduce drastically the expenses of the Faculty of Medicine (after another, failed, attempt in 1883-1884) and of the Faculty of Law – which anyway had minimal budgets – and to dissolve a series of important institutions and schools for Iasi: the Normal School for Girls, the Conservatory, the Fine Arts School, the Pedagogical Seminary, the Anti-rabies Institute.

The academic community in Iasi and the local intelligentsia in general could be but shocked by the intention of the government. The Normal School for Girls was the oldest in the country and the only one located in Moldavia (while in Walachia four of them were funded, of which two in the capital), while the Conservatory and the Fine Arts School, even though they had less students than other similar institutions in Bucharest, were yet indispensable for the cultural life of Iasi. It was pretty clear that without the Pedagogical Seminary, the Faculties of Letters and of Sciences could not train the future secondary teachers, given that their major mission was to train teachers, and only secondly to produce science. Obviously, to close the Anti-rabies Institute was equally inappropriate, given that this was essential for the health of the inhabitants of Moldavia; the institute had been created in 1891 by Professor Emil Pușcariu from the Faculty of Medicine, being the fourth in the world, after Paris, Odessa and Bucharest.

For the first time, in a long history of inequities, the academic and civic milieu of Iasi, led by the academics, managed to make an exemplary mobilization and, confronted with this common block and with arguments systematized in an excellent manner by Rector Alexandru Xenopol¹⁵, the government gave up the initiative. How-

15. The Rector wrote that Iasi lost, with the Union, its political significance, it also took tough economic blows, but it preserved a cultural and scientific brightness and the Centre would be completely unjust to annul these “privileges”. Xenopol used a

Diagram 3
The teaching staff of the Fine Arts School and of the
Conservatory in Iasi and Bucharest 1883-1913



Source: Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice [Ministry of Cults and Public Education] 1883 (pp.104-105), 1908 (pp. 319-321), 1910 (pp. 359-361), 1913 (pp. 329-330).

ever, this small victory did not equate a balancing of the situation, as the capital maintained its privileges in culture and education. A comparison between the teaching positions at the Fine Arts School and at the Conservatory speaks for itself (see Diagram 3)

This was, roughly sketched, the universe in which the academics of Iasi strove to resist, before the First World War. As the pressure of the Centre increased, their impression of narrow horizons, diminished and restricted opportunities, absence of local solutions, were more acute. It is ironic that the most common form of reaction of the professors from Iasi against their marginalization and against the discrimination that the University of Iasi was submitted to, was to struggle to ... get transferred to Bucharest.¹⁶ This “resistance re-

further argument in order to save the integrity of the University, which constantly appears at that time: in case the institution declines or disappears, more Romanians in the area would prefer to study at the University of Chernivtsi, than to the one of Bucharest, an aspect that would harm of “cause of Romanianism”. See Xenopol 1901. 16. The condition of the university professors in Romania, without representing an exception in that time’s Europe at all, was different from the condition of their fel-

action” has a more interesting history than the way in which the University of Iasi turned into a provincial one.¹⁷ The practice of transfers hurried up to a considerable extent the transformation of the university of the capital into an elite one and, at the same time, weakened the one in Iasi: the former obtained, with no efforts or investment, fully trained, acknowledged and experienced teaching staff, while the latter lost important names of its academic life.¹⁸

The Interwar period: new context, old habits

After World War I, the same attitude advantaging the University of Bucharest in the detriment of the one in Iasi, persisted, though the situation grew even more complex. Due to the peace treaties, Romania was acknowledged the right to territories such as Transylvania, North Bukovina and Bessarabia. In the first two there were already the University of Cluj and that of Chernivtsi, which had to be funded as well, abundantly usually, out of the wish to demonstrate the solidity of Romanian education in those areas. After the territories and the population of Romania increased significantly, Bucharest had a much more consistent central budget than before, distributing the funds towards the four universities. This time, the most advantaged one was the University of Cluj, which had been anyway better equipped since the times of its belonging to Austro-Hungary, but came in terms of the number of students after the University of Bucharest and that of Iasi.

lows in the universities of German inspiration, characterized, among other things, by the mobility of the students and of the teaching staff. In Romania, where the universities were funded exclusively by the state, the university professors were assimilated to the senior civil servants, they were appointed by Princely or Royal decree, were permanent and could not be transferred without their agreement. Until World War I, these transfers were unidirectional (to the University of the capital city) and represented a full recognition, at a national level, of the “fortunate” professor.

17. For a presentation of the teaching staff involved in this “unidirectional academic migration”, see Toderăşcu, Maleon, Botoşineanu 2014.

18. In most of the cases, the solicitations of transfer resulted from the wish to be in the core of the political/public life, but there were also situations when the Professors chose the University of Bucharest for the more appropriate working conditions, better libraries, better-equipped laboratories, sufficient experimental materials, etc.



FIGURE 3: The new building of the University of Iasi (finished in 1897). Image from the beginning of the 20th century.

In this new context, the consolidation of the elite University of Bucharest stagnated for a while, but the funding differences compared to the University of Iasi remained visible. So that, in spite of the long traditions and history, the inhabitants and the professors of Iasi always lived with the impression that they were becoming a kind of colony, with no right to speak, and that they are rapidly outdistances, in the order of importance and of priorities of the central administration, not only by the capital, but by Cluj too.

The majority of the intelligentsia of Iasi gave up and passively accepted the situation, which they considered a fatality. Giving up the fight, they left behind an isolated minority who continued their efforts to repair the situation, by using often a significant dose of verbal violence. That is how could be explained the fact that only some of the professors of the University (Grigore T. Popa, Gorge Pascu, Alexandru Slătineanu, etc.) were known to consistently militate for the observation of the rights of the University of Iasi and against the peripheral condition.

To a greater extent than during the previous years, the city of Iasi proved to be unable to preserve the intellectual forces it had trained or affirmed. Besides the fact that tens of important local

graduates, once tenured at the University of Iasi, tried the solution of personal salvation by the transfer to Bucharest or even Cluj, the scholars trained in the capital got to deem the University of Iasi a springboard to, or a waiting-room for an academic position in Bucharest. They introduced thus a new scourge, the so-called “university ambulance”, i.e. they lived in Bucharest¹⁹, and came to Iasi one or two days a week to give their lectures, a severe impediment to the normal functioning of the institution. One of the defenders of the University of Iasi, Giorge Pascu, ironically proposed, in 1931, a solution meant to take into consideration these professors’ love for the capital city:

“As three quarters of the Law professors of Iasi live in Bucharest, from now on the Faculty councils will be held in Bucharest. We are waiting for the great moment when the courses of Iasi will also be made from Bucharest, by telephone. As the French say, *Université de Iasi, Bucarest*”²⁰.

More and more present in the public area is the idea that the University of Iasi is treated inequitably when the budget of the Ministry of Education is made. For instance, a *Memoir* to the Ministry of Public Education approved by the Senate of the University of Iasi in January 1922 underlined the fact that the institution was neglected because of its geographical position, but especially because of the “unfortunate increasing centralization, which attracts to Bucharest all the country’s powers and resources”. The chronic underfunding was particularly pointed to, which was condemning the University

19. Many of them do not manage to adapt themselves at all to the city of Iasi. For instance, Petre P. Negulescu, sent to Iasi to control and limit, as an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Letters, the spreading of the socialist ideas, which were very strong in Iasi out of different reasons, had initially refused the position, considering the environment of Iasi “completely opposite to the way I am a real exile place”. See Ornea 1978, p. 285. And the literary critic George Călinescu, though he had accepted an academic position at Iasi in 1937, shows irritation related to the difficult situation of the city, which he called an “infamous village”, observing that “everybody, sooner or later, flees Iasi”. See Rosetti 1977, p. 60.

20. Pascu 1931, p. 189.

to a modest life, one of a minor school compared to the capital, not to mention the great European universities.

In the interwar period a new competitor appeared, which pushed things even further: the University of Cluj, abundantly funded in order to support the idea of the Romanian cultural superiority in the area. Without objective criteria, the budget disproportion reached in 1922 a level hard to accept: 12 million lei (local currency) for Iasi, 23 for Bucharest and 54 for Cluj! And things kept on deteriorating in the following years, so that Rector Alexandru Slătineanu decided to sound the alarm. In a report published in the “*Annals of the University*”, he analysed impartially the problems and the differences that affected the institution of Iasi and discontented the local spirits. The reason why the funds for the University of Iasi were twice smaller than those for Bucharest and ten times smaller than for Cluj was for him an impenetrable “budgetary mystery”. The conditions in which the University functioned made it unable not only to play its cultural and national role in the region, but maybe even more gravely to diminish its scientific prestige, blocking it at the periphery of the field and annulling its chances to stand out on and increasingly complex market²¹.

The vehement attitude of some academics of Iasi was also the result of some projects of the University of Bucharest deemed gargantuan, given the difficulties Iasi was confronted to. For instance, a memoir submitted to the Ministry by the Faculty of Law of Bucharest noted that the institution had the duty to be “a core of light” for the other faculties in the country, and to train the future leaders of Romania, so they were asking for a quadrupling of the number of chairs (58 more, besides the existing 23)²².

In the fourth decade, the University of Cluj was not a priority for the government anymore, so that the funding of the educational system was again favouring Bucharest. In 1934 the capital was allotted more than half of the national budget meant for the salaries of the higher education staff: the University of Bucharest, together with the Academy of Architecture, with the Higher Commercial

21. Slătineanu 1924-1925.

22. Pascu 1928.



FIGURE 4: Interior of the main building of the University of Iasi (today the Library of the Technical University “Gh. Asachi”). Recent picture.

School and the Polytechnic School received a total budget amounting to 128 million, while the University of Cluj one amounting to 51 million lei and the University of Iasi to only 48 million lei²³.

Things degenerated to such an extent that the demotivation of the professors of Iasi grew contagious. Some of the stances, more realistic and mobilizing, stated that the local environment should be more active just because the Centre had no real intention to support the University of Iasi. One of the most respectful Professors, Grigore T. Popa from the Faculty of Medicine (who will eventually transfer to Bucharest at the end of his career) remarked that the University of Iasi, treated by the government as “the poor relative, coming from impoverished parents, who live on the leftovers” should help itself, to promote itself better, including by jubilees, by means of “beautiful festivals and festive volumes”; this way, the internal cohesion of the teaching staff and of the student population would also increase, a premise for the construction of a different future²⁴.

23. Ministerul Instrucțiunii, al Cultelor și Artelor 1934, pp. 158, 164.

24. Popa 1929, p. 4-5 and 18-19.

It was equally true that in the history of the University of Iasi, the funding of these jubilee anniversaries was often refused or postponed by the central administration. In 1875, the funding request for a “little jubilee” (15 years since the foundation) was rejected, and in 1910 when they could celebrate half a century of existence, the ceremonies were postponed (out of objective and subjective reasons) to the following year; this affected the image of the University and created an impression of lack of care. A new funding refusal was recorded in 1935, when the school environment of Iasi celebrated a century since the foundation of Academia Mihăileană, an institution that once had included higher studies, so that Professor Gorge Pascu got to write in a local gazette: “in a period of ferocious centralism, what’s the fun in celebrating the centenary of a provincial university, older than the university of the capital city?”

Therefore, besides the centralist policy and the interests of the authorities in the capital, the lack of local energy, the inability to continue the started projects, the problematic cohesion of the teaching staff of the University of Iasi and even some personal petty interests were equally responsible for the escalation of differences between the University of Bucharest and that of Iasi. Although chronically underfunded and discriminated by the decision-makers of the time, the University of Iasi survived and continued to bring forward scientific results in fields such as sciences, medicine, but also in the field of humanities and in legal sciences, as well as to play a major role, through its graduates, in the positive evolution of a society that still had a lot to make up for until it could reach the development and refinement level of the “enlightened Europe”.

Conclusions

This “story” shows that the privileged funding of a central, elite university, from public funds, is very complicated issue, in the context of a budget always insufficient for the field of education, provoking a whole range of problems, inequities and disequilibrium situations in other areas of the same country. In the case of Romania, it was very important how the country was built and how the nation got crystalized: initially by the union of two different states, Moldavia and

Walachia, with theoretically equal rights. When the promises made during the Unification negotiations, and even the legal provisions were infringed in order to turn the University of the capital city into an elite one, this happened in the detriment of the University of Iasi, the first Romanian university. In fact, one of the reasons it had been created was to transform the city of Iasi into a “capital” of culture and education, in order to mitigate the different types of losses suffered following the establishment of Romania’s capital at Bucharest.

The University of Bucharest was favoured by the central authorities, first of all when a significant number of chairs and specializations was approved, then when bigger funds were granted, which in the interwar period got to be twice as big as those assigned to the University of Iasi. Meanwhile, the oldest Romanian university, a privileged target of many budget reduction projects, was constrained to function under emergency procedures, given that, being not allowed to hire enough professors to complete the curricula, it was late, for a while, in giving its graduates the academic degrees. This fact explains the relatively small number of students over the first two decades – a good pretext for those who wanted the university dissolved – as part of the youth in the region, looking for higher studies, chose to go to Bucharest.

Even under these circumstance, marginalized and underfunded, the University of Iasi managed to play an important role in the Romanian academic life, and even to become an important “brain” provider for the University of Bucharest. In fact, this unidirectional academic migration was one of the most serious problems of the University of Iasi, whose teaching staff were trying to transfer to the university of the capital, where they were enjoying better national and international visibility, and implicitly higher chances of professional success and social recognition.

Some of the imbalances were repaired by the communist regime installed after Second World War who, though it did not renounce the special attention paid to the University of Bucharest, tried to reduce the gaps between the different regions and institutions. But other problems started to appear then, such as political purges, academic publications and teaching materials censoring, total control over the students’ life, etc., based on a well-known model.

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Academic centralization in Romania until World War II: Forging an elite university in the capital city of Bucharest and the reactions of the competing University of Iasi

Source of the images: personal archive Leonidas Rados