

ON ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA – A SHORT ANATOMY OF A FAILURE

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Abstract: The article develops an analysis upon the actual status of the academic communication within the contemporary Romanian academic system. A relatively wide range of academic forms of communication is being briefly analyzed and presented. A special attention is given to the way in which these forms of academic communication are present today, in various structures and contexts, in Romanian academic life. At this point we develop a deep analysis upon the set of effects of these forms of academic communication. These effects are being analyzed here on different levels and fields of interest and a completely distinct analysis is further developed only upon the set of negative effects of these forms of academic communication. Here we make a relatively wide discussion about the main causes which in our view are responsible for these unwanted effects. This discussion is made here together with a short descriptions of them. In the end we make some recommendations in order to change for the better the actual status of Romanian academic communication from within actual Romanian academic system.

Keywords: Academic Communication, Academic System, Human Resources

Introduction The issue of academic communication within the actual Romanian academic system, due to our knowledge at least, did not benefit until now from a significant attention. Upon this topic there are no substantial descriptions or analysis. Of course, today there is a relatively rich literature on the general subject regarding the situation of the contemporary Romanian academic system but a specific analysis upon the forms and contexts of academic communication does not have today a significant extent among the Romanian academic scholars. This is one of the reasons because of which we decide to develop an analysis and a general description upon this topic. Another one, closely linked with the first one, is given by the fact that today in Romania is present a significant *trend* in the field of academic communication. It manifests itself through a relatively wide range of forms and in various academic contexts but the most important of them are the so-called system of annually organized “conferences” or periodically making of “academic communications` sessions”.

This phenomenon can be encountered on a very large scale within the contemporary Romanian academic system and it is present in every academic domain. Due to the fact of its public abundance this phenomenon should have a proper analysis in terms of its *efficiency* and also in terms of its *real academic impact*. But, yet, until now there are no significant debates or analysis upon this topic. Even there were some discussions in our view they did not have to strength and coherence to deliver a real picture about this phenomenon with all its implications, developments and possible general negative effects.

Starting with the above considerations our first task will be here to identify the concrete forms through which this academic phenomenon of scientific communication is present within the actual Romanian academic system.

Academic Communication – Forms and Contexts within Contemporary Romanian Academic System

In its most general and common form the process of academic communication is developed in Romanian contemporary academic system through *conferences* and *academic sessions of scientific communications*. Of course, in its complete structure the process of academic communication is not reduced only to these two general forms but, however, these two are the most encountered within the so-called Romanian actual “academic life”.

The first form is also divided in different other specific forms. Thus, the most common form is the one represented by those annually scheduled conferences, with national or international participation. Some of these conferences will have their work published either at national level either to an international one. At a modest level, formally speaking, it also could be encountered the so-called “academic sessions of scientific communications”. These events are a sort of an academic event in which the participants are getting together in order to communicate and to share, in an academic manner, the results of their scientific research. Beside these two general forms it also could be encountered another type of academic event, the so-called frame event represented by the *Academic Days*. This last type of academic event can be encountered today in Romania on a relatively large scale and it is the most visible in small towns of the country. This kind of event represents an important opportunity for the local communities to gain some visibility and also to satisfy their own local pride.

We do not question here the quality of what is published after these academic events. This analysis will be made somewhere later within this paper. What we want to underline here is the fact that almost all types of so-called “academic” events are now in Romania a part of a well-defined *trend*, a trend through which the national academic communities tries to keep pace with the international academic life. Of course, as we will see later, it is very debatable if this trend is indeed able to connect the local national academic community to the international academic life but, what is sure until now at least, is the fact that this trend *is still gaining momentum*.

Making Science and Communicating Science – General Aspects and Preliminary Considerations

Before we can go any further from this point we must make here some observations upon the concept of academic communication. Thus, beyond the formal structure, represented by those concrete forms about which we already talked until now, the process of academic communication have, *or at least it should have, a substantial academic and a robust and credible scientific content*, a content which should be able to properly disclose *the results* of a process of scientific research. In other words, the essence of any *healthy* academic communication consists exactly in the action of transmitting what the researchers have found through their academic research projects. And, in order to do so, these research projects *must be themselves authentic modes of making science*. So, *any healthy academic communication must be from the very beginning based on a healthy academic work of developing scientific research projects*. From the start this imply at least the fact that *the researchers themselves*, before any other consideration, must have an ethical and responsible academic behavior. They must doing their research work not only by respecting a well-defined set of high standards of an ethical academic behavior in making scientific research but also by being themselves serious and highly trained academic scholars. It is obvious for anyone that if these two *preconditions* are not fulfilled from the start than it cannot be any academic life at all!

Further on it is also easy to see that the first two preconditions, the ethical condition together with the professional one, even they are absolutely necessary in order to have a healthy academic

life in general, *they are simply not enough to sustain a proper process of academic communication*. This is true because a scientific researcher must have scientific results of his research before his presence at any academic communication form. And even at this point we must underline that these results of a research work, in order to be ready to communicate and thus to be assimilated by the academic community, must be *valuable* and completely obtained through a well-defined set of academic standards regarding the scientific research. Even more, this is still not enough *because we have to be aware about the necessity of having an academic quality of the receiver*. It almost does not count too much if you have indeed something to communicate from your scientific research if the audience is not fully prepared to properly receive the results of your research. And, at the final stage of this process, we must be also aware of the fact that the results of any scientific research, if we already assume that it all were successfully passed all the stages described until now, must be properly published in scientific journals with solid academic standards in publishing but also with authentic scientific standards in selecting the content of what it should be published.

So, as it is very easy to see, the work in itself of making scientific research and publishing the results of this activity requires a set of conditions which are clearly describable and simple to understand. These conditions are covering a relatively wide range of factors beginning with the professional quality of the researcher and ending with the publishing conditions of results. Somewhere along this way it can be encountered the process of academic communication in its general form of conferences and sessions of scientific communications. Given this brief analysis we now can go further and in what will follow we will try to see and to disclose the status of the general process of academic communication from within Romanian contemporary academic system.

Academic Communication - A Brief Anatomy for Contemporary Romanian Scholars

As we have seen this process of academic communication is developed within the actual Romanian academic system through general forms and by some standard institutional contexts. Among these the conferences and various sessions of releasing the scientific results are the most common. But beyond this formal frame we want to go here much deeper and to disclose *the real content*, the authentic face of the whole process. From the very beginning we underline the fact that this paper reflects our own view upon the entire phenomenon of academic communication from contemporary Romanian academic system and this view is based, on one hand, on our direct contact and on our direct experience with this phenomenon and, on the other hand, *upon the real results of these academic events, results which are very easy to found among the international system of academic publishing*. Also, these data can be officially found in Romania to those institutions which are entitled to monitor the scientific research activity from the country. Thus, beyond the personal experience will be available a set of data which reflects the real presence within the international system of academic publishing process of Romanian academic scholars.

In what will follow we will try to depict in brief the main set of elements through which someone can obtain an accurate image and a correct perception upon the whole process of academic communication from nowadays Romanian academic system. This process could be understood by disclosing, on one hand, the way how the system formally works and, on the other hand, by disclosing some elements regarding to its participants. Both aspects have some other distinct elements but in brief these two one are the main ingredients.

Regarding the “system”, an expression through which we designate here the process of academic communication in contemporary Romania, we have to be aware of the fact, as we seen,

that nowadays the process of organizing the so called “conferences” had become a veritable *trend* within the Romanian academic field. There are few reasons because of which this trend has gained momentum in the last years. It is vital to analyze these reasons because they are the fundamental key through which it could be properly understood this process.

Thus, the first reason is linked with some *administrative needs* which are specific to the contemporary academic system from Romania. Today in Romania, in order to be promoted and to advance into the academic career, you have to obtain for every step of your career some legally defined so called “*points*”. These points are designed to shed a light upon your academic performances and among these performances are a number of *mandatory presences* at academic events. And, of course, these academic events also contain those conferences and sessions of academic communications. So, it is easy to understand why these so called “conferences” have such a big success among the Romanian academic scholars. This is happening because these events are an excellent opportunity for the researchers to obtain the number of points which is needed in order to complete the *administrative standards* for advancing into their academic career. Thus, one of the major reasons because of which there are so many participants to these so called “academic” events is due to the fact that through these type of events every participant can get the points that he needs. And, further on, this also is one of the reasons because of which this administrative motivation has a tremendous *negative impact* upon the quality level of almost all the papers which are presented at these “academic” events. We will insist a little more upon this topic later. However, it is very important to notice this situation. A significant majority from the nowadays Romanian academic scholars` segment is mainly motivated to participate to these type of events due to their administrative importance.

We are fully aware that the picture described above depicts a general frame and the things are here relatively simplified. But, anyway, *they are not simplified too much*. Our intention is to go directly to the essence of the entire phenomenon in a quick and transparent manner and some aspects are being simplified in order to get a broader picture upon the entire process. However, it is easy to understand that the scientific results in itself are not the main reason for these academic events. If this would be the case then the Romanian academic scholars should have been by now the most prestigious and the most prolific researchers from the entire world. And this excellent status would be reflected in the academic international publishing system. Once again, this is not happening and this state of facts can be very easy verified by anyone who decides to consult the *official data* about the publishing performances of the scientific research of the actual Romanian academic system. We will return to this topic later.

The second major reason for the explosion of this type of academic events, “conferences” and other similar forms, has a link with the *financial gain* that can be achieved by the organizers. Upon this sensitive topic there are no substantial studies but what is sure is the fact that this financial gain is present even if nobody can deny the need to cover some costs in organizing these type of events. What is sure is that some academic structures had developed the habit of making good money by annually organizing different types of academic events. We admit that the financial dimension is not always present but, however, it is hard to deny this manner of making money, *within a debatable ethical frame*, at the academic institutional level.

The third reason is about *local pride*. Today in Romania there are many local universities which have no or have only little academic tradition and with no scientific prestige. Also they are almost completely without any international *credible* visibility. More badly than this is the fact that much of them are not visible even at a national level. However, this type of local university, even it does not have, in the vast majority of the cases, a logistical or scientific background, they do,

however, organize these events with hundreds of participants dissipated on days in order to sustain their so called “scientific communication”. This spectacle is in some cases terrifying and in the same measure *stupid* as long as the participants simply do not have something which indeed can be scientifically communicated. But, as a sort of positive fact, even at these level there are some exceptions. We talk here about scholars with a certain academic value, researchers which can rise the general level. This phenomenon is, anyway, isolate and small.

So, as an intermediate conclusion, in our view in a significant number of cases the academic events from contemporary Romanian academic system is not present the fundamental motivation for their reason to be! There is no need here for an extensive empirical proof in order to recognize this status. It is sufficient to look at some sets of academic indicators *provided by some official academic structures of the Romanian state*. Thus, let us take here one example, the situation of ISI ranked journals from nowadays Romania. In the recent years there were only 58 such highly ranked academic journals for the entire Romanian academic system! (<http://cncsis.gov.ro/articole/65/Reviste-cotate-ISI.html>).

This means that the whole set of academic fields is covered by this number! And we have to be aware of the fact that even this ridiculous small number of ISI ranked academic journals does not contain journals which are at the top of the list within the international academic publishing system. And with no doubt one of the reasons for which these academic journals cannot obtain their international ranking is due to the fact that is not too much to be published in them! Romanian researchers, with all our respect for individual performances, seem to be unable to compete with their international colleagues from abroad, especially with those from the Western World.

Fake science, Fake Scientists - Real Issues, Real Failure

Before we continue it is very important to mention here that this phenomenon of mass participation to a large number of so called “academic” events is not only widely spread but *it is also producing huge amount of legal effects*. Thus, even if in the vast majority of cases and papers that are being published after these “academic” events we still cannot talk about authentic science regarding those papers yet, *their publishing is legally recognized and the researchers can use the points which they get after participating at these ridiculous events to advance into their personal academic career!* Once more, for an outsider it can be relatively difficult to recognize the fraud made by these so called “academic” papers or “academic” presentations. This is the situation and it is so for various reasons but we must notice that *these papers have the appearance of an academic paper*. They have references and most of them are relatively well structured. However, at a second look it will become very soon obvious that these papers do not have the slightest academic value. It is just something almost entirely formal and their publication can only produce administrative personal benefits. However, what is also obvious is that these type of academic events are generally organized in a proper manner. The PR techniques are working in the majority of the cases and this has as a result a large number of participants.

A distinct reason for which the number of participants at these “academic” events is so high, a reason which must be taken into consideration, is given by the *poor standards of selection*. Almost anyone who wants to participate is accepted, which insignificant exceptions. Thus, the chances that the papers which will be presented by these participants to be of low or very low academic quality are very high.

And thus we can assist to a dramatic and in the same measure stupid theatre. The papers from these “academic” events do not represent authentic acts of making real science! And if these papers are not real science than neither their authors could be considered scientists! *Not even honest researchers*. There is an immense absurd spectacle in these events. Properly speaking within circumstances like these actually nobody is speaking for nobody because there are rare the cases in which a researcher presents his paper to an auditorium who knows the topic of the paper. The huge number of participants, the poor quality of the auditorium, the low scientific level of the participants and other similar elements give to these events an air of surrealism. Once more we underline a fact: in order to get any proof for our observations it is more than enough to look at some *official data* regarding *the real scientific performances* of the contemporary Romanian academic researchers.

And once we arrived to this point it could become very soon obvious which are in fact the real set of issues for the entire system. First of all, and this is the most important of them, is the poor standard of academic training in the case of the researchers. We will speak briefly about this topic later. Other causes are linked with the *general decline of the Romanian academic system*. And all of these means a terrible failure of the system because not only that the system is not able to deliver real science but also it seems *incapable to deliver a proper scientific training to its students*.

Fake Science – Its Causes and its Terrible Effects

Before we go further we must take a very short look upon *the causes* which are responsible for this negative situation. There are indeed few general causes which are directly responsible for this huge historical failure of the entire Romanian academic system in its dimension of scientific research. Some of them are not even recognized at an informal level while others not that are admitted but are also being recognized at a formal level. The most important of them are linked with the improper set of measures and procedures which are design to sustain the procedures of internal promotion within the system. These are obsolete and they are filled with fraud, imposture and maybe in few cases with some legally penal elements. The stuck in the past is one the main reasons for which we cannot speak now for Romanian academic system about a real system of cleansing the imposture and to bring into the system young researcher with a certain high academic value (Liiceanu, 2011). A distinct level of fraud is encountered ad the doctoral level. From the admission to the final stage there are many problems today in this field in Romania. As it has been stated, to undermine this level from the academic system means to undermine the fundamentals of an entire nation (Şercan, 2017). What is certain here is also the fact that a poor quality at the doctoral level had, of course, a terrible negative effect not only in the process of selecting the future Romanian academic scholars but also to their concrete “academic” performances. And thus becomes obvious another distinct cause for which we have today in Romania such a poor quality in the process of academic communication and in general in the process of disseminating the results of scientific research. This is because there is not too much to be communicated!

And, if it was not enough, we also must notice here the *moral decline* of a significant part from the actual academic Romanian segment. Thus, beyond other things which can be linked with this process of an abrupt moral decline, and for which some members of the actual Romanian academic community should be blamed, it must be remembered here their horrible complicity with fraud in the story of the so called “scientific” research from the nowadays Romanian penitential system. We have here in mind the complicity of some Romanian contemporary academic scholars in validating a huge fraud represented by the papers written by convicts in order to facilitate their earlier release from the prison (Cincea, 2018). If these academic scholars had gone so far than it

should not be a surprise their “performances” to some academic events from the process of academic communication!

But beyond the general causes there are many more others and among these last ones a *bad bureaucracy* has also a major negative impact upon the functionality of the whole system. Thus, the Romanian academic scholars have to fulfill a long list of *administrative indicators* and this simple fact is more than enough to distort the health of *real scientific activity* within the system. And, among others types of activities the research activity and also the publishing of the results which occur from this activity are both part of the duties for any academic researcher. The administrative absurd requirements are thus a major negative cause for which the general process of academic communication has to suffer so much within the Romanian contemporary academic system. Since you have to complete so many papers it is obvious not only that you will lose time by fulfilling this bureaucratic task but also this it will directly affect your academic research activity (Maci, 2016). And more than this, such an enormous administrative task will force you to “produce” science of poor or very poor quality in order to complete on paper those administrative standards. This is also one of the main reasons for which the fundamental motivation for Romanian contemporary academic researchers to participate at almost any “academic” event and to publish after participation their “scientific” results is the need to fulfil bureaucratic and administrative standards. Thus we will have tons and tons of “scientific” volumes which only will waste large amount of money for their publication (Maci, 2017).

Of course, there are others causes for this disastrous situation. About some of them we already talked in one of our previous papers (Păcurar, 2017, pp. 141 – 157). What is certain is the fact that this situation is producing *terrible effects* not only upon the functionality of the entire academic system but also upon its *credibility* and, by extension, *this state of facts also generate alarming effects upon the entire Romanian contemporary society*. Because once you have undermined the building of your human resource at the academic level than the effects upon the functionality of the entire society will appear very soon (Păcurar, 2017). Thankfully, there are today within Romanian public space responsible individuals which are sounding the signal of alarm and which are trying to convince the elites, especially the local ones from the local and minor universities, to stop the general process of promotion by fraud and incompetence into the actual academic Romanian system (Funeriu, 2018). These individuals from the local elites, the local academic elites have indeed a crucial role today in Romania because on their shoulders lies the huge responsibility of reforming the Romanian university in general and of restoring its pride, honor and credibility.

And, following the above line of approach, any form of fraud within the scientific community, and these so called “academic” events are in a significant measure nothing more than different forms of fraud, could lead also to negative effects within the scientific community as well. There are today some very interesting investigations and debates upon this topic, analyses which shed a light just upon this topic: how pseudoscience could destroy not only the credibility of the researchers` segment but also the credibility of science among the general public as well (Allison B. Kaufman, James C. Kaufman – 2018). Even if within these academic events the pseudoscience is relatively strictly encapsulated within the small community of the academic staff it is, however, obvious that is not protected against the accusations of making pseudoscience in general with all its disastrous negative effects upon different levels and segments of society.

But maybe the worse effect are the general “results” of the work of this segment of insufficiently trained researchers as teachers at university. With a human resource of poor or very poor quality Romania does not have today the necessary force to quickly improve its modes to

efficiently and properly train the students regardless the formal level of the educational system. This is one of the main causes which conducted today to this disastrous situation. There are some studies upon this topic, many of them made by some international organizations, which clearly testify the poor level of qualification which is obtained by Romania` contemporary students (Maci, 2018). The main aspect responsible for this is also the poor quality of the “trainers”. And, if we take into consideration the fact that from among these students will be recruited the next generation of academic researchers it is very easy to understand not just how this vicious circle is absurdly closing itself but also to understand one of the reasons for which those participants to the “academic” conferences are today so unprepared and why they are producing, in vast majority of the cases, only pseudoscience or, at the best, just *toy science*.

Conclusions

It simply cannot be denied the fact that in the majority of cases the organizing and the promotion of various contemporary Romanian academic events the PR action and its effects are indeed, formally speaking, *positive*. These events *are well promoted* and, with small exceptions, they are also well organized. But beyond this huge *emptiness of words* it seems to be nothing. *With few exceptional cases these academic events are producing nothing*. They are maintaining a low level which is specific only to the toy science, a “science” made, in the best of cases, from compilations, or, in others, build through different forms of fraud and incompetence. An indeed terrible mix of imposture, absurd and decline.

Yet, we are not completely hopeless. This is because in the last years it started to appear in Romania the seeds of improvement. Even if these seeds are very few and only at the beginning we must to have hope. Thus, now there are more and more cases of *personal excellence* in the field of academic research and also in the domain of publishing the scientific results. Of course, this process is in some way only at its beginnings but what really counts is its simple existence. Unfortunately we still cannot speak of something systematic and thus the majority of the academic system is yet to be reformed. However, what it is more encouraging is the fact that among some very well trained academic Romanian contemporary scholars there are also some of them which are fully capable not only to understand the gravity of the situation but also to propose themselves solutions and high standard strategies in order to improve the actual conditions (Baumgarten, 2014).

But beyond the personal excellence, which is very possible even within the actual conditions, Romania must to be aware of the fact that it will be need a strong political support. This is true because the whole system, even in its general communication process regardless if we speak about publishing the results of the scientific research or other collateral aspects, needs a set of coherent measures and rules. Among these we can mention here for example the need of rules for establishing a much more serious selection of the participants, rules for getting the financial supports from the state for any form of academic event through which science is disseminated in a one way or another, rules for public promotion of these events and so on.

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