Abstract

The master programmes in the field of public administration reveal two trends, and in spite of being contradictory they ensure both the convergence and specificity imposed by the continental/national realities:

- A thematic focus on public management (MPM), public policies (MPP) or public affairs (MPA);
- A diversification of the content and didactic methodologies related to the traditions and national public developments.

The preoccupations on enhancing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are more visible in the context of applying thoroughly the principles of Bologna Declaration. The recent EHEA Ministerial Conference and the Third Bologna Policy Forum in Bucharest have highlighted that EHEA "is constructed on the basis of common European principles and on the growing internationalisation of higher education" and "HEIs welcome the opportunity for evaluation, accreditation or audit that incorporate their diverse activities and have an international added value". EHEA countries’ focus on promoting Quality Assurance (QA) in higher education has been expressed in institutional building and promotion of contents and practices compatible at European level. The need for programme internationalization is also supported by QA transnational organizations as well as several projects aimed at joint programmes. In this context, the current paper aims to present, in a comparative approach, the modalities and good practices derived from external QA evaluations for the quality of programmes in the field of public administration, accomplished by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA) for bachelor and master programmes in the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest, Romania. The general research framework will be structured according to the priorities of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and will be based on the self-evaluation reports as well as the reports of external evaluation, accomplished recently by ARACIS and EAPAA experts.

1. Introduction

The consolidation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has generally created and has imposed procedures, standards, instruments and frameworks of analysis, evaluation and comparison as best practices. Moghadssian and Dosse (2008) highlight instruments concerning quality assurance, European and international frameworks as well as the level and subject specific to the European Frameworks, referring to experiences in four European states: Germany, Belgium, France and Luxembourg. The general conclusions of the study reveal the
diversity and complexity of the issues on quality assurance, both on conceptual and practical level. “Not only the concept has made great demands on both theorists and practical persons, but also the implementation of a system which should assure quality” (Moghaddassian and Dosse, 2008, p. 35).

2. Quality assurance in higher education – a continuous process

The institutional framework for quality evaluation and assurance has been continuously developed. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) represents one of the outstanding institutions in the field of education quality assurance. Concerned about the quality of procedures in EHEA, ENQA has achieved during 2003 – 2012, three surveys emphasising both the preoccupations and qualitative leaps in undertaking and implementing the procedures for quality assurance as well as “visions for the future” (ENQA, 2012). Those studies, included in the Prague Communiqué on 19 May 2001 express and substantiate the collaboration among universities, other institutions of higher education, national agencies and ENQA “in establishing a common framework of reference and disseminating good practice” (ENQA, 2003, p. 3).

The most important conclusion was that since 1990, “the European quality assurance has extended both in scope and type of evaluation methods and especially the concepts of accreditation and benchmarking are gaining new ground fast” (ENQA, 2003, p. 3).

Organised in another perspective, ENQA study (2008) concluded about a series of significant methodological issues, demonstrating a process of maturity for the procedures on quality assurance in higher education. Although the study raises the issue of a comparison with the so called “convergence of education quality” (Crozier, Curvale and Henard, 2005; 2007), the final conclusions remark that “it is unrealistic to expect that the same model(s) of quality procedures are applicable to all; legal, social, pedagogical and other contexts are different and quality assurance must reflect these” (ENQA, 2008, p. 88).

3. The target group and research method

The target group comprises programmes provided by prestigious European and American universities, accredited by the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA) or National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA).

“Public Service Management” – Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj Napoca, Romania (MPA_UBB)
“Public Sector Management” - National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania (MPA_B)
Master’s Study Programme in Administration – University of Ljubljana, Slovenia (MPA_L)
“Master in Public Administration” – The National Academy of Public Administration, Kiev, Ukraine (MPA_K)
Master programmes in Public Administration
- University of Arkansas at Little Rock (MPA_ALR)
- Auburn University Montgomery (MPA_AUM)
- University of Washington (MPA_WU)
- Georgia State University (MPA_GSU)

The curricular analysis has proposed the ideas comprised in EAPAA (1998) as fundamental ideas and it has used public information as well as self-evaluation reports of EAPAA/NASPAA. In this respect, we defined six independent variables with characteristics that will be evaluated by studying the content of curricula and syllabi as well as the transferable credits assigned.

3.1. Methodology

a) A unitary framework of analysis was used, specific for the second cycle of Bologna Process, taking into account master programmes organised in 4 semesters, each semester of 14 weeks of direct activity with the students. 30 ECTS are assigned to each semester, 120 ECTS is the total number of credits. Sub unitary or supra
unitary multipliers were used for the programmes whose credit systems do not correspond to ECTS in order to make them compatible with the above unitary framework.

b) The independent statistic variables, \( X_i, \ i = 1,6 \), correspond to the knowledge areas emphasised in EAPAA (1998) concerning: society (\( X_1 \)), political system (\( X_2 \)), public administration and governmental policies (\( X_3 \)), bureaucratic organisations and their management (\( X_4 \)), methods and techniques of governmental management (\( X_5 \)), methods and techniques of communication (\( X_6 \)) (Matei, 2009).

For each independent statistic variable, \( X_i, \ i = 1,6 \), the number of credits corresponding to the type of knowledge required will be quantified. The evaluation of the convergence degree will be achieved by using optimum levels of knowledge, \( X_i^{opt}, \ i = 1,6 \), for each variable.

The optimum level of knowledge is determined taking into account a methodology specific for benchmarking. Therefore, we may consider three alternatives in the current study:

A1 – the optimum level of knowledge as mean of the levels of each programme.

A2 – an internal referential in the sample of the programmes analysed. In our case EAPAA/NASPAA accredited programme.

A3 – an external referential, recognised at European level, such as a programme provided by a prestigious European university.

We calculate the index of internationalization/convergence in the three alternatives for each programme:

\[
I_{int} = \frac{1}{120} \sum_{i=1}^{6} (X_i^{opt} - |X_i - X_i^{opt}|)
\]

Usually, this index will be comprised between 0 and 1, the extreme values indicating the divergence (0), respectively, total convergence (1).

3.2 Empiric analysis

According to the structure of the previous proposed statistic variables, the evaluation in transferable credits of the content of the analysed programmes is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>( X_1 )</th>
<th>( X_2 )</th>
<th>( X_3 )</th>
<th>( X_4 )</th>
<th>( X_5 )</th>
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<tr>
<td>MPA_ALR</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPA_GSU</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>MPA_WU</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPA_AUM</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPA_UBB</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPA_B</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPA_L</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPA_K</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: the authors

Those results lead to an evaluation of the index of internationalization (Table 2)
Table 2 Index of internationalization

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Programme</th>
<th>Index of internationalization</th>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Index of internationalization</th>
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<tr>
<td>MPA_ALR</td>
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<td>MPA_UBB</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<td>MPA_GSU</td>
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<td>MPA_B</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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<td>MPA_WU</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>MPA_L</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPA_AUB</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>MPA_K</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: the authors

4. Conclusions

Analysing briefly the data from Table 1, we remark that the highest weight of the master programmes is awarded to the methods and techniques of governmental management (27.08%) as well as to the knowledge about public administration and governmental policies (25.1%).

The statistic analyses of correlation highlight most coefficients as positive, some correlations being very powerful, for example those between MPA_ALR and MPA_GSU and all the European programmes (coeff. cor. 0.867 – 0.946) and weak correlations, such as those between MPA_WU and MPA_AUM and the European programmes (coeff. cor. –0.089, –0.123).

Comparing the statistic means of US programmes (MPA_US) or European programmes (MPA_EU), the coefficient of correlation is very high (0.792). Related to a general statistic mean variable (MPA), the highest coefficients of correlation are for MPA_GSU (0.987), MPA_ALR (0.945), MPA_UBB (0.929) and the lowest coefficients of correlation are for MPA_WU (0.276), MPA_AUM (0.2961).

As a general conclusion, we may state that the level of compatibility of the content of MPA programmes in Europe and US has increased in the latest years. It is due to the two accreditation institutions EAPAA and NASPAA as well as strengthening of the professional dialogue among universities and academia. The level of the index of internationalization accomplishes a certain hierarchy, although the context of the actual research should be improved by incorporating the Person correlation coefficients.

References