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**ISSUES AND CHALLENGES ON STRATEGIC  
DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM  
IN ALBANIA.**

**ABSTRACT**

Education is one of the most important priorities of the strategy for developing, which will guarantee the progress. According to this importance that education has, it has come into view and is done an initial issue that has taken place in governance of Albania.

The aim of this study was: a) to stress the importance of the strategic planning in this phase of the development of sustainable education, b) to evident and analyze the actual problems that the education is faced to c) to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of strategic planning development in sustainable education and society. The exertion of this proceeding is connected to some conclusions and recommendation that are considered as an essential part of it.

The information used for this study is based on multiple sources. A qualitative research design was used with the purposive and opportunity sampling being applied. Data was gathered using focus groups, and in depth semi-structure interviews and was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Through interviews we tried to identify some of the problems associated with the process and to draw conclusions for strategies for the future of education. Interviews were addressed and distributed at management levels of educational institutions in various universities.

The key finds of this study showed that strategic development plan for higher education in Albania is considered the document that articulates a vision of what higher education we wish for and envisions the direction

of fulfilling the strategic objectives. The management of universities reflects the cooperation between political factors, academic and scientific community, students, civil society, education stakeholders and the general public. There can be no sustainable social development without respect for the diversity in society.

**Keywords:** Strategy Plan, Sustainable Education, Higher Education System, Issue

### **Introduction**

Higher education has a primary role in building a skilled human capacity to face the challenges of the time, so it is the case that the education sector is central to reforms, as in transition countries, and in countries developed. The education system in Albania has undergone many changes in recent years, in terms of quality, and also in terms of management.

In this period of huge transformations in Europe and in the region need to communicate with the international community is considered an important partner. Therefore, it can be said that higher education in Albania, despite the challenges and problems faced at this stage, but tends towards regional and European integration. At such a stage, every company should consider medium and long term development of education. Despite numerous problems and willingness to make changes, we understand that there are no easy solutions and the rapid development of higher education system.

Given this definition for our country to become an inseparable part of the European Area of Higher Education as defined in the objectives of the Bologna Process, the choices and the choices made will be able to create preconditions for higher education to be a function of sustainable development of society.

### **General issues**

Strategic Development Plan for Higher Education in Albania is considered the document that articulates a vision of what higher education we wish for and envisions the direction of fulfilling the strategic objectives.

The management of universities should reflect the cooperation between political factors, academic and scientific community, students, civil society, education stakeholders and the general public. There can be no sustainable social development without respect for the diversity in society.

In XXI century, higher education is considered one of the key drivers of democratic consolidation and economic prosperity. In this sense, universities play a central role in creating political and social stability and the consolidation of a democratic society. Higher education is one of the essential components of social and political transformations, which also directly affect the steady state institutions and the creation of preconditions for economic development. As shown by the experiences of many other countries, education helps scale staff in ensuring quality and competitive in the labor market. Therefore, the higher education system, the political situation and economic development are interrelated and interdependent.

In essence, higher education institutions have some main functions and mutually interrelated: the function of enriching the knowledge and skills of staff development function for the labor market and ultimately social and political functions.

Given these facts, Higher Education in Albania must be perceived as an opportunity and as a key factor in the growth of human resources, which on one hand allows economic development and in turn could strengthen the democratization of society.

### **Methodology and main objectives of the study**

The information used for this study is based on multiple sources. For this purpose it is used not only experience and previous studies of the authors, but also many other Albanian materials and foreign authors. This work has been aimed at gathering information on knowledge and implementation of the process of education in public and non public universities. Through interviews we tried to identify some of the problems associated with this process and to draw conclusions for strategies for the future of education. Interviews contain mostly questions structured and semi-structured in order to allow freely express opinions, evaluations, comments and suggestions from respondents. Interviews were addressed and distributed management levels of educational institutions in various faculties of public and private universities.

## **Context of Higher Education in Albania**

What is actually happening in Albania is a constant change of the legal and institutional framework of the Higher Education space. These changes are partly caused by general movement that characterizes the last 20 years in Albania, and at the same time, due to the continued impact and dynamics of the European Space of Higher Education. The main indicators of these changes can be summarized in a drastic and continuous laws and regulations in the Higher Education System; important developments have taken place in higher education space caused by the entry of private operators in this sector; development of perceptions and choices about university studies-component development of other essential aid to higher education and vocational training. Leadership styles and their potential effects on the environment are often defined which makes it possible to be implemented and tested<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time there are some key indicators that should be kept in mind: First, universities operating in which sector? Is it public or private sector? Secondly, what kind of legal restrictions on universities operating in the process of setting targets and goals and in providing service delivery. Legal restrictions placed on the System of Higher Education, some restrictions general condition and guidance to universities. Currently, the mission and goals of higher education are generalized. In this context, what can be the model and the most appropriate style of leadership in the planning of higher education in Albania? In the public sector, the main objectives set by the Government must be followed and the Ministry of Education and Science and secondary decisions are left to the other participants. It mainly affects many elements mentioned the teaching objectives, the market in connection with diplomas and titles of the study, strategic planning and long-term orientation of public universities. Research activities conducted and directed based on the central organizational structure and considered as part of the overall process, which includes teaching and training. At the same time, the development of curricula managed, structured and evaluated by central agencies. Clashes between the models often bring disorientation university staff, the total lack of a clear orientation for the future and development of academic shallow.

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<sup>2</sup>Gazeta 55 “ Institucionet e Arsimit të Lartë në Shqipëri, probleme të drejtimit dhe strategji për zgjidhjen e tyre” 24 Dhjetor 2010

It seems that the management teams of private universities in Albania are showing much more careful in the selection and implementation of an organizational model, although the selection of their repertoire is quite wide. This is because the general climate and potential changes to the law are converging towards a partnership between the state and private sector in higher education. Albanian private universities have created a broader base in the management and development of the university, ranging from special unit (department or faculty) about the development of curricula and research up to the senior. Albanian university system is facing the charges stand objectives vital to the future of the Albanian society. This system should be able to absorb massive demand growing to attend university, must face the challenge of modernization and qualitative improvement, must find the balance necessary and establish equality and reciprocity between the university system public and non-public, should to find ways and opportunities to generate and attract the financing necessary, should be open and accessible to an international assessment of the international basis for the quality of its bid should be more attractive to the human resources quality of motivated in the academic sphere, there must be a degree as high autonomy of operation and management in all spheres of its activity, should close the cycle of implementation "Bologna Charter"<sup>3</sup>and to be more integrated all the European university system internationally.

Some strategic objectives and the means to achieve them are presented as follows:

- To enable the development of society and the establishment of standards of democracy and citizenship;
- To assist the country's economic development through the preparation of qualified people;
- To meet the aspirations of young people by providing opportunities for all to education;
- The well affects the education of future generations by building a healthy society without social conflicts;
- To implement the reforms in order to achieve European standards;

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<sup>3</sup> European Students Union( ESU 2007), Bologna with Students Eyes -*The National Unions of Students in Europe*, May.2007

- To raise standards of teaching and learning through the application of information technology in universities.

Actors (stakeholders) are interested in accordance with the objectives and interests to identify the most appropriate strategy to minimize weaknesses and threats of the external environment.<sup>4</sup>

Appreciating the difficulties in this sector, and the challenges set by the timing and development of the country, we present strategic alternative that best suits reforming higher education.

Creating a functional system to achieve European standards by:

- design an appropriate legal framework, awareness of society to the challenges of higher education; create independent institutions to assess the education system;
- increased academic autonomy, structural, financial and administrative;
- provide the necessary financial resources and human
- increasing the budget earmarked for higher education;
- distribution of a specific budget intended to deepen qualification of academic staff;
- Granting autonomy to the management of income generating universities themselves.<sup>5</sup>

### **The role of strategic planning in higher education**

Education is considering one of the strategic development priorities, which guarantee the progress of society. To this importance that it has, higher education is become the primary issue and occupies a central place in the Albanian government programs. His role is interconnected with all the characteristics of a society. Education in general and higher education in particular, constitute without a doubt one of the most important areas of the life of a nation. He has long-term and sustainable impact on all aspects of activities related to the people and their welfare

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<sup>4</sup> Standarde dhe Udhëzime për Sigurimin e Cilësisë në Hapësirën Europiane të Arsimit të Lartë, Dhjetor 2007

<sup>5</sup>Gazeta Shqip, (Rivjera Dedaj) “Dekanët dhe rektorët konflikt për kompetencat”, dhe (Jonel Kristo) “rikthimi në luftën e klasve” 19 maj 2008, Tiranë

In this framework we should emphasize the importance of drafting a strategic plan for higher education, which indeed would require time, resources and long-term commitment, but would have positive effects incalculable in all areas and the effects of leaves development of the country.

The strategic thinking requires not only analysis, but also the synthesis that require creativity and intuition. The role of the analysis is to provide inputs for the drafting of the strategy and evaluation of results, where required to fulfill several tasks such as:

- Think more than ever in the long run;
- Should translate their intentions into effective strategies, which will enable coping with environmental; changes,
- Strategies need to dismantle programs that will assist in the implementation of strategies.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2000, higher education environment in Albania has undergone radical transformations. Year 2002 marks the establishment of the first private university and today their number has reached almost 35, mostly concentrated in Tirana. Respondents believe that "education sector is a strategic sector that has, at national as well as institutional level" (universities, faculties, etc.). Currently, one of the strongest barriers to entry into higher education sector is legislation.<sup>7</sup> But, as we have witnessed, this is not happened in the higher education sector in Albania. Opening a private university is considered the most comfortable business with lower risk and safe profits

Modern education emphasizes critical thinking, analysis and processing of knowledge and the need to achieve intellectual independence is one of the conditions that promote progress. Besides the poor quality of universities that has to do with poor management of existing resources, there is a discrepancy of educational official policy with labor market demand.

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<sup>6</sup>Strategic planning in higher *Education : A guide for heads of institutions, senior managers and members of governing bodies*

<sup>7</sup> Jan de Groof (2008) Some legal aspects relating to the internationalization of higher education quality assurance

The advantages of private universities look at all the aspects that make up the high school. *First* private universities to enable the recruitment of individuals educated in western universities or professional quality prominent otherwise could not be enticing to teach at public universities modest salaries. But, it is only a matter of salary but also flexibility in managing human resources. Recruitment of young professors at public universities become an excessive formality, really procedures are not followed correctly. Even when recruited young, they have little opportunity to choose courses that will teach and often affixed giving subjects they do not have the expertise, but which are assigned involuntarily. *Secondly*, it comes to the materials budget poor Albanian state is very difficult to ensure large classrooms, teaching aids, adequate lighting, heating and labs while private universities Albanian private capital investment has made the grades with fewer students equipped with air conditioning and with the necessary tools to teach, to be a condition sine qua non. *The third* has to do with the content of teaching programs often closely linked to the second factor. Here we should mention that the abundance of financing allows to reconcile the expertise higher programming and so small classes, high motivation of the teachers well paid, and the material basis of having permits application of the most modern methods and interactive tools advanced technology in teaching. The small size of these schools makes them to be more flexible with the program that it very easy embraces of methods or the most modern materials and knowledge during the learning process. Likewise, the direct dependence of the number of students, makes these private schools are always in a frequency with the labor market more easily adapting to needs and trends.

Unfortunately for the moment it is difficult to occur in public universities not only because existing capacities and possibilities of the state budget to add they are limited, but also because the management system and their organization is outdated, staffs they find it difficult to fit the needs of the time. But even when it comes to these obstacles, state universities have little room for maneuver as for example the salaries are sorted according to a referential rigid top-down and a university public finds it difficult to attract, motivate or reward an outstanding professional or successful professor. While they have guaranteed standard of living of the simultaneous employment of private universities, two or three jobs it allows these individuals to continue to teach vocation somewhat to social public university status



## **The impact of the external environment of the university strategic planning**

Various environmental forces can be less or more important for the university. Managers of public sector and civil service are particularly interested in public policy and perhaps demographic changes. Remote environmental factors are: economic, social, political and technological. Review and evaluation of these factors is important to find the opportunities and threats posed by the environment in the universities.

### *Economic factors*

Economic factors related to the nature and direction of the economy where the organization operates. Increasingly important economic influences today are becoming international. In terms of global trade liberalization, internationalization and globalization of the economy will continue at a rapid pace.

Economy in a prolonged transition has brought a very unstable labor market. The growth of this “businesses” requirements for high performance, prosperity, continuity and dignified representations have increased the demand for qualified staff.

Although income distribution is very uneven and disposable income for most of the population are below average, the cost relatively low attendance studies and liberalization of entry to universities, has enabled completion at an acceptable level of demand [ the amount] for higher qualification, while on the other hand based on the conditions of the transition and the massive rapid and accompanied by strong measures to support should emphasize that the quality of work in the system of higher education has often fall bringing problems in many faculties and universities. "Education is a long-term investment, should start today and matures after 15 years minimum. I look forward to this, survival will tell ", - said an academic with experience in our education.

### *Social factors*

Social factors include the beliefs, values, attitudes, opinions and lifestyle of individuals who belong to the organization's external

environment. Social factors are conditioned by the situation of cultural, ecological, demographic, religious, ethnic education and the country where the organization operates. For a long time, Albania has experienced the phenomenon of brain drain [brain drain] and the need to generate intellectual capacity and potential was evident<sup>8</sup>.

Removal of intellectual labor force in those years was in 4 ways:

1. Direct migration: Here we should mention two types of migrations: the emigration of Albanian intellectual elite in terms of Western Europe, USA, Canada, even far away, in the direction of Australia; and migration of the elite towards Eastern Europe, to and from Israel.
2. Non-returning home from various specializations.
3. Non-returning home after graduation elsewhere.
4. Employment in international organizations in the countries of Africa and Asia.

Albania, which has funded the education of its specialist's often Western countries, has failed in its investment in the light of investment expenditure. The opinion of the respondents that were asked to give their opinion on the state of our universities are summarized as: "They are in the same place that you list the country. If you are the fifth economy, we will be the fifth in education, health, football, etc"

### *Political Factors*

Leadership and political stability factors is one of the main issues that stakeholders should take into consideration in formulating the strategy. Political factors determine the legal and regulatory parameters within which organizations must operate.

The government is essential greatest influence in education policy. Understandably, policy stability is a very important factor in the education system in general and to the particularly high. 10-year-old last was drafted two laws of higher education<sup>9</sup> who contributed significantly to the creation of a content more modern system of higher education, but with the opening of Albania to advanced systems European current legislation of higher education must necessarily take new form to reflect changes in the entire

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<sup>8</sup> Gëdeshi, I. Mara H., Dhimitri R. dhe Krisafi K., "Aspekte të Emigrimit të Elitës Intelektuale në Shqipëri gjat periudhës së tranzicionit", Qendra për Studime Social Ekonomike, Tiranë 1999

<sup>9</sup> Ligji nr.7810, datë 6.4.1994 "Për arsimin e lartë në Republikën e Shqipërisë" dhe Ligji nr.8461, datë 25.02.1999 "Për arsimin e lartë në Republikën e Shqipërisë"

system in accordance with European standards and models. Current conditions and targets for inclusion in the European family require decentralization and inclusion of a greater autonomy for universities as well as a rationalization of responsibilities and roles of various central bodies.

### *Technological factors*

Technological developments and in particular the rapid pace of advancement of information technology in the world has so many significant including our country. Especially young people are facing an information boom, possession and well-administration of which brings the necessity for education and training. There are a great many studies and projections in this direction, but the challenge lie in their use of public administrators.

### **Conclusions**

Higher Education System of Albania has gone through continuous transitions. Currently, it has raised a series of questions and dilemmas for management models and styles not only for individual institutions of higher education, but also for the National Education System as part of the European Higher Education Area. Recent research, driven by the environment always changing, in which institutions of higher education operating in Europe and beyond, bring to the fore a view steering, scientific and practical at the same time, to assess the problems and their choice, in the perspective of development and orientation of Higher Education.

Education Management Systems comes as a practical field of study related to the operations of educational institutions. He focuses primarily educational goals and objectives. Although apparently, the link between goals and direction is near and close, there is a risk of driving more in many procedures, at the expense of organize goals and values. On the other hand, a greater threat still represent those universities or faculties, which under the banner of academic freedom and natural organic development, abuse and misinterpret situational models showing an utter lack of consideration for the procedures and structures.

It is required the creation of the perception that the direction of these institutions has no intention or primary value of its own. In every situation, heads of educational institutions are facing internal pressure and external

between regulation dimensions of leadership, management and administration in their work. It has a huge impact on the direction and management of educational institutions, how prepared and implemented a model. This is because firstly, the facts support based solely on action; it requires an interpretation of them, which makes the process subjective. Second, the leadership in action just from personal experience of management, including experience leaves no other members of the institution. Finally, we must keep in mind that changing the educational context (as is still the case in Albania) makes the experience as the only guiding tool for action, not enough bringing in foreground suggestions theoretical models.

And as formal models are used, the more attention to hierarchy and authority is, the more the system is oriented towards a goal that has been set and accepted roles that derive from this. The problems of this approach are numerous and Albanian institutions experience proves this. First, this is because the treatment of faculties and universities as institutions oriented to achieving the objectives may result unrealistic in many cases. *Secondly*, decision-making cannot be considered as a result of rationality, because it is influenced by individual interests and angles.

In this regard the face of these challenges essential, required and involvement widest of all academic structures university in the country, which requires an engaged civil society and opinion advanced contemporary requires close cooperation with international partners and benefit from positive experiences and many other countries in this field.

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