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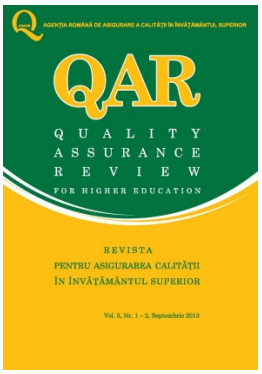

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Ranking the Romanian Departments of Sociology. Comparative Results of Different Evaluation Methodologies

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Rezumat: *În articolul de față discutăm despre ierarhizarea programelor de studiu românești din domeniul sociologie, pe baza indicelui g succesiv la nivelul departamentelor de sociologie. Nevoia și consecințele ierarhizărilor din învățământul superior reprezintă un subiect intens dezbătut. Astfel, vom chestiona ipotezele și logica ce stau la baza oricărui exercițiu de evaluare și ierarhizare. Ulterior, ne concentram pe o metodologie specifică de ierarhizare, bazată pe indicele g. Totodată, vom arăta că metodologia oficială alternativă, fundamentată pe un număr considerabil de indicatori, care măsoară așadar comprehensiv conceptul de calitate, produce în mare aceleași rezultate. În cele din urmă vom discuta despre avantajele și dezavantajele utilizării unui index sintetic (precum indicele g), comparând cu exercițiile de evaluare care se bazează pe indicatori și dimensiuni mai numeroase.*
Cuvinte cheie: *ierarhizarea programelor de studiu din domeniul sociologie, indice sintetic, indicele g*

Abstract: *In this article we will discuss the ranking of the sociology higher education study programs in Romania, on the basis of departmental g-successive index. The need and consequences of rankings in higher education is a much debated topic. Thus, we will look a little bit into the assumptions and the logic that underpins any evaluation and ranking exercise. Having done so, we will stumble upon a specific ranking methodology that is largely based on g-index. We will nonetheless show that the alternative official methodology, based on a considerably higher number of indicators, though measuring more comprehensively the concept of quality, largely produces the same results. We will eventually discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using synthetic indexes (like g index for instance) comparing with evaluation exercises that take on board more numerous indicators and dimensions.*
Keywords: *ranking of the sociology higher education study programs, synthetic indexes, g-index*

Introduction

In the current paper we will undertake a ranking of the Romanian Sociology Departments using a methodology that has been developed by Vîiu, Vlăsceanu and Miroiu (2012), an alternative methodology to the official ranking methodology developed and applied by the Romanian Ministry of Education in 2011. The alternative methodology takes equally into account research and teaching indicators using a much smaller number of indicators than the official methodology. We aim to compare the two rankings and to test the plausibility of a unifactorial model behind the quality concept that is evaluated in these university rankings.

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Context

The ranking of the higher education study programs is currently a very debated issue worldwide. The advancement of the New Public Management (Hood 2011, Hood, James, Peters and Scott 2004, Hood 1998, Margetts, Perri 6 and Hood 2010) has brought the ideas of competition and measuring output in fields which were previously seen as too complex and having too general and vague objectives in order to be effectively and realistically measured let alone compared. Nonetheless, the more operational and universal the definition of universities' objectives have been stated in several international policy documents (Various inter-ministerial declarations), the more pervasive the idea of developing indicators for measuring universities' performance as regards their stated objectives. Also, inter-institutional and inter-departmental comparisons of performance across different dimensions like teaching, research or community engagement as well as benchmarking key achievement levels have become more widespread. The public responsibility of universities has begun to gradually change from being focused on processes and inputs to outputs and outcomes. But measuring the performance is not a neutral evaluation exercise. It has two crucial consequences: first it informs the prospective clients on the strengths and weaknesses of a particular provider of study programs; by doing so, it reduces the information asymmetry between the buyer and the provider of study programs and makes the market more competitive. Secondly, it informs the public decision makers of the effectiveness of public spending and consequently impacts upon the policy process: study programs which are more performing than others (in terms of learning or research outcomes) shall be financed by priority. If measuring the performance of the higher education institutions and programs is a largely accepted idea than the idea of *competition* between similar institutions/study programs cannot be avoided.

Further, if the idea of competition spills over, rankings of institutions and/or study programs are the means to stimulate it. By ordering the study programs and/or institutions according to their measured performance, those most performing will be more able to attract financial resources and students. However, the strongest critique of the rankings is based on the idea of *institutional diversity*; rankings or league tables are by definition reductionist, they compare the organizations/departments along a single composite measure; it is argued that, by changing the methodology, using different indicators or different weights, we will have different rankings according to the particular strengths of higher education institutions (hereafter, HEIs) or study programs (most usually teaching or research focus). This critique assumes the diversity of HEIs and their different specialization on research and teaching respectively. Therefore, the main problem in generating a single rating is to what extent will such ranking be valid for different profiles of institutions (teaching and research for instance)? How shall performance be commonly measured? How do we define the core objectives of study programs for instance and their weights in assembling a single performance index? What are the various dimensions of quality that should be taken into account when measuring performance? Eventually, how do we decide between quantitative evaluation and qualitative appraisal? These are important questions which should be taken into account when deciding on a comprehensive ranking which informs the policy making at least with regard to financial allocations. Nonetheless, notwithstanding these debates, our hypothesis is that, for the sociology departments in Romania we have an underlying unifactorial quality model and quite little horizontal differentiation which allows us to make valid rankings (vertical differentiation) inside the comprehensive set of sociology departments.

Quality Approaches

First, let us stumble upon a definition of quality. What exactly is the performance that we want to measure? How do we define quality in higher education? In general, there are two dimensions corresponding to the objectives of the study programs: research and education. A third one, community engagement, also becomes widely used in the evaluation of both programs and HEIs. Also, there are

two important approaches to evaluation: one is qualitative based on peer review, another one is quantitative based on quantifiable and measurable indicators.

Table 1. *Quality approaches*

Types of approaches	Research	Education
Qualitative	Peer review of the core works of teaching/research staff	Peer review of open lectures Peer attendance during examsExternal appraisal of graduates' thesis
Quantitative	Scientometric (number of articles, impact factors of journals, citations etc.) Bibliometrics	Ratio of students enrolled/students admittedRatio of graduates/enrolledRatio of graduates employed/ total graduates etc.

The problem is that neither the quantitative nor the qualitative are infallible evaluations; they are both partial, measuring only some aspects of a comprehensive concept of quality. It is, for instance well known that quantitative evaluation only takes into account what can be easily made operational and what is easily measured. On the other hand, it is also well known that the qualitative evaluation may be more comprehensive, but it is less standardized and more prone to subjectivity of the evaluator.

However, these limitations are alleviated by the fact that, as we will show in relation to the Romanian sociology departments, quality seems to converge into a rather unifactorial model; therefore, there usually is a high correlation between the quantitative and qualitative evaluation results as well as between teaching and research indicators. This makes the researcher's role easier as it may actually employ fewer indicators in order to produce a valid ranking. The evaluator may thus decide between a parsimonious model or more complex and comprehensive models, but in the end the results will very much converge.

One of the most widely used synthetic indices for evaluating research is the *h- (Hirsch) index* or alternatively the *g-index.* This have become widely used and validated in various researches. Given a set of articles ranked in decreasing order of the number of citations that they received, the H score is equal to "the largest possible number *n* for which *n* of a researcher's publications have been cited at least *n* times." The h-index however does not discriminate the cases when a researcher has one or a few papers with considerably higher number of citations than the others (these being maybe an indicator of outstanding quality of those papers). Therefore the g-index is the largest number such that the top g articles received (together) at least g^2 citations. The g-index thus pools together the citations of the first most cited articles and by doing so it is generally higher than the h-index. The axiom that the g-index fulfills, and the h-index does not, is that by moving one author's citations from weaker articles to stronger articles, the research index should not decrease. It is then possible to calculate the performance of collectivities, be these departments or institutions by calculating either mean h/g-indices for faculty members or by calculating successive indices. A successive g-index for a department is calculated by ordering the department members decreasingly according to their individual g-index. The successive g-index of the department is the highest number such that the top g members have individual g-indices that sum together at least g^2. While the average *h* and *g* indices measure the aggregate productivity of individual members of a department, the successive *h* or *g* measure the research capacity and productivity of a departments as determined by a core sub-group with the highest performance. It is a measure of the capacity of the department to have a *radiant core* to produce research and to attract and develop human resources around the core. The successive *h* and *g* indices tend to measure the extent to which a department has a consistent highly achieving core whose scholarly individual performances are comparable rather than any of the average indices which can more easily get inflated by the work of one or two high performing academics[1].

[1] This problem is not eliminated by the succesive g-index which is in fact based on the average, but only of the citations of the core best achieving sub-group of individuals.

There are quite some articles which show that these indices and peer review on one hand, or using a complex set of indicators, on the other hand produce rather similar ranking results in a population of university departments. These studies show that there is a high degree of correlation between those rankings. Either we speak of different rankings based on education and research criteria respectively, or quantitative versus qualitative evaluation (of research for instance), there is a high degree of correlation. Departments that are strong in research, prove to be also strong in teaching as Vîiu, Vlăsceanu and Miroiu (2012) show in their ranking of political science departments in Romania. Furthermore, institutional quality diffuses across fields. For instance Jarvey and Usher (2012) show that in the Canadian higher education sector, „strength in social sciences and humanities is generally correlated with strength in science and engineering" (p.19). Comparing qualitative with quantitative evaluation results, Lazaridis (2010) found that "the mean h-index correlates well with qualitative perceptions of the quality of each department". Norris and Oppenheim (2009) prove that there is a high correlation between the peer ranking and the h-index ranking for most of the subjects analyzed (information management and pharmacy in particular) and a less successful result for anthropology. "The earlier work of Oppenheim (1997) and Norris and Oppenheim (2003) showed strong correlations between overall and average citation counts and the rating given by the RAE for the 1992 and 2001 rankings. […] This result (based on successive *h* or *g* indices – our note) tends to suggest that depth of overall performance more realistically reflects the RAE peer ranking process" (Norris and Oppenheim, 2009, p.227). These findings suggests a unifactorial model (based on the quality/ productivity of human resources) can be employed to derive valid rankings.

The above mentioned literature provides important empirical evidence to show that the *h* and *g* index scores have therefore an important discriminatory power and can be parsimoniously used to generate university rankings. We will now employ a methodology based on successive g-index to evaluate the sociology departments in Romania and show that the results obtained are very much correlated with the ranking of a much more comprehensive evaluation methodology used by the Romanian Ministry of Education in 2011. We will also show the peer review qualitative evaluations (both at department/field of study or institutional levels) produce quite indistinctive results.

Methodology

In our alternative ranking to the official one realized by the Ministry of Education in 2011, we used the methodology developed by Vîiu, Vlăsceanu and Miroiu (2012). They have ranked the political science departments in Romania using nine indicators for two general criteria: research and teaching.

Table 2 *Criteria, indicators and associated weights used in ranking*

Criteria	Indicators	Individual indicator weights	Criteria global weights
Research	Successive g-index of department	0.7	0.65
	Research projects / department staff ratio	0.2	
	PhD students / total students ratio	0.1	
Education	Department size index	0.4	0.35
	Staff / student ratio	0.2	
	Graduate / undergraduate student ratio	0.1	
	ERASMUS students / total students ratio	0.1	
	ARACIS confidence score for study programs	0.1	
	ARACIS confidence score for the university	0.1	

From Vîiu, Vlăsceanu and Miroiu (2012)

As it can be seen in Table 2, the research is evaluated through three indicators: the successive g-index of the department, the ratio of research projects to the department staff and the ratio of PhD students to the total number of students. The highest weighting is for the successive g-index that we have described earlier. It actually measures the scientific productivity of a core most productive researchers of a department. It has to be noted that the g index has a greater discriminative power than the h-index for instance.

The successive g-index of a department is simply a second order g-index, calculated on the basis of individual g-indexes of the staff members of a department[2]. We thus firstly found out about each individual member's g-index and then calculated the successive g-index based on these results, "treating first order g-indices of the department members as number of citations is treated in the calculation of the first order g-index[3]" (Vîiu, Vlăsceanu and Miroiu, 2012).

In order to calculate the first order g-indices of the sociology department members in our study we used Anne Harzing's *Publish or Perish* program which has the Google Scholar database as a source for citations measurement. Although this database is comprehensive and has the greatest discriminative power for the Romanian sociology departments in relation to alternatives such as *Web of Science* or *Scopus*, some limitations should nonetheless be acknowledged. Firstly, not all of the scientific productions are indexed on this database or other work is indexed and it should not be properly labeled as *scientific*. Secondly, there are name coincidences or names that are wrongly or incompletely indexed and that may bias the individual g-index results. Thirdly, the g-index calculated by the Anne Harzing's *Publish or Perish* program also includes self-citations and also happens to make multiple references to the same item. However, we worked with the assumption that these types of errors are randomly occurring and do not substantially alter the second-order results at department level, though may do so at the individual member level.

We computed these indices only for the full-time staff members that have teaching/research tenure within the ranking department. The same as in the research done by Vîiu, Vlăsceanu and Miroiu (2012), we used the personnel lists submitted by the universities themselves to the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereafter ARACIS), for the authorization and accreditation of the study programs within the sociology field of study. These staff lists were then cross-referenced with the lists of full-time staff members available on the websites of the investigated departments/universities.

All the other indicators and data sources have been the same as those used in the ranking of political science departments done by Vîiu, Vlăsceanu and Miroiu (2012).

Data Analysis

During this section, we report data collected from the level of 17 Romanian higher education sociology departments. Specifically, conducting this alternative ranking exercise we took into account all the Romanian higher education sociology departments that passed through at least one quality peer evaluation run by ARACIS and that are, therefore, accredited or at least authorized to offer sociology programs.

In the process of collecting the raw data, we used as a reference guide the alternative ranking methodology (see Vîiu, Vlăsceanu and Miroiu, 2012). Actually, we applied the alternative ranking methodology to all the Romanian sociology departments. So, after processing the quality self-evaluation reports[4] corresponding to each sociology department, we were able to establish the entire

[2] The idea of a successive g-index was first described and used Richard Tol, "A Rational, Successive G-Index Applied to Economics Departments in Ireland", *Journal of Informetrics,* 2/2 (2008), 149–155

[3] Suppose for example a hypothetical department made up of only 5 members; if inspection of each reveals g-indices of 9, 4, 2, 2 and 2, then the successive g-index of this department would be 4 because the cumulative score of the first 4 members (17) is greater than 4^2; it could not be 5 because the cumulative score of all the 5 members (19) is not greater than or equal to 5^2.

[4] Authors would like to deeply thank ARACIS for the entire support provided for this research. ARACIS supplied us with valuable information concerning the human resources profile of each Romanian sociology department. Building on this information, we determined for each sociology department a list of full-time working professors (academics).

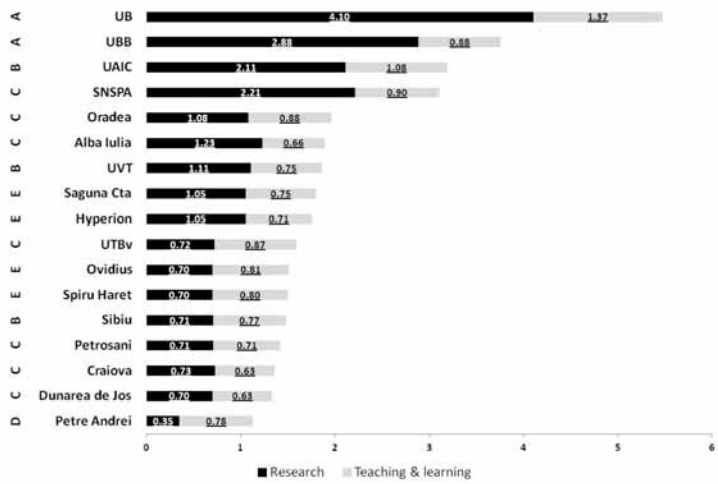
population of full-time working academics employed in each Romanian sociology department. Building on these quality self-evaluation reports, we reached 17 lists of full-time working academics. Afterwards, the next step was to compute nominal g-index and h-index scores[5]. It is worth mentioning that our computation covered a population of 255 persons, out of which 110 were female academics.

For all the other variables defined by the alternative ranking methodology, we did a secondary analysis on the raw data available on the official webpage of the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (i.e. UEFISCDI); these raw data were collected by UEFISCDI directly from the universities during the 2011 evaluation exercise in order to rank the study programs.

There are some limitations that must be stressed in relation to the raw data we analyzed. As previously mentioned, the 17 Romanian sociology departments full-time working academics lists were compiled using the official data provided by ARACIS. However, due to objective factors (e.g. the quality assurance evaluations for university study programs are carried only at regular time intervals; every 5 years, more specifically), the official lists made available by ARACIS happened to be out of date in some cases were the evaluations were carried away a few years ago. Consequently, we had to update our entire data sets by cross-referencing them with the staffing information available on departments/universities web-pages. So, in the end, the list of full time working academics was made up referring both to the ARACIS reports and the university department web-pages.

On the basis of the data available from these different sources, the alternative ranking methodology produced a ranking order of sociology departments that is displayed in Figure 1[6]. On the left side of each department, we mentioned the official ranking class each department fell into following the evaluation done by the Ministry in 2011. For instance, University of Bucharest (i.e. UB) and the Babes-Bolyai University (i.e. UBB) were officially ranked in class A, the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi (i.e. UAIC) was officially ranked in class B, the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration (i.e. SNSPA) was officially ranked in class C, and so on and so forth. Additionally, in Figure 1, each aggregate bar can be decomposed into two scores: a score for *research* and a score for *teaching & learning*.

Figure 1. The alternative ranking of the Romanian departments of sociology



[5] The actual computation of nominal g and h indices scores via Publish or Perish software package was successfully carried away by students enrolled at the Management and Governance MA program organized by the Department of Political Science (National School of Political Studies and Public Administration). Under the given context, we would like to express our acknowledgements to all the persons involved in this research project. The coordination of the data collection was undertaken by the authors. The research report is to be available on the webpage of the Center for Human Resources, Management and Marketing: http://ccerumm.sas.unibuc.ro.

[6] The code-book for the Romanian sociology departments is available at the end of this paper, in Annex 1.

By inspecting the data in Figure 1, we can notice a positive correlation between *research* scores and *teaching and learning* scores ($r = .82$, $p < .01$). This observation supports the assumptions held by scientometric approach representatives, according to whom a specific department's quality of teaching and learning activities can be estimated by measuring that department's scientific research activities in terms of outputs and outcomes.

Concerning the impact of scientific research activity, we ranked the sociology departments using both successive g-index and departmental h-index (Figures 2 and 3). As a supplementary note, both in Figure 2 and in Figure 3, each aggregate bar can be decomposed into two scores: an impact score computed based on research items (i.e. papers, books, book chapters etc.) published after 2006 (i.e. G2 (06_13) and H2 (06_13)) and an impact score computed based on research items published up to 2006 (i.e. G2 (_06) and H2 (_06)).

Figure 2. Ranking the Romanian departments of sociology using g-successive index

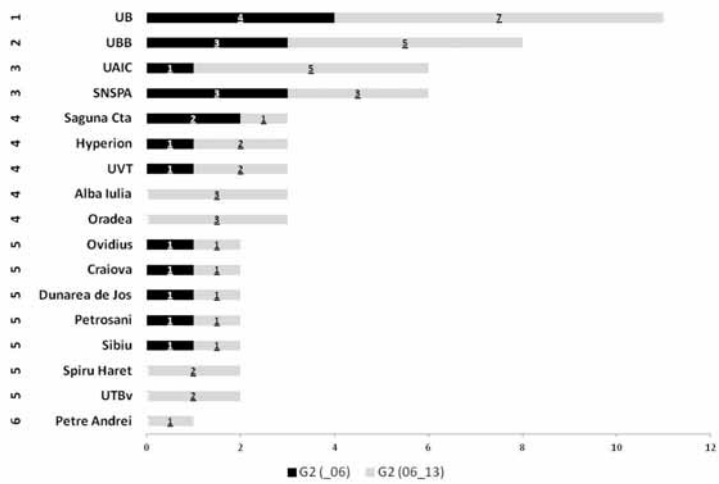
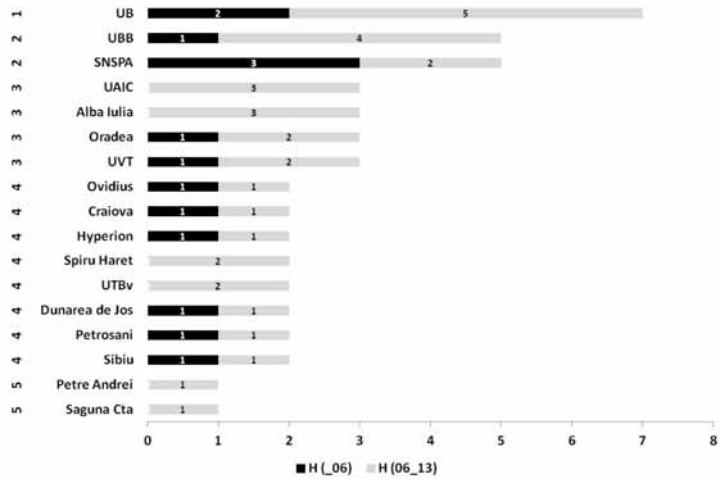


Figure 3. Ranking the Romanian departments of sociology using departamental h-index



In Table 3, we present a comparison between the ARACIS study program peer evaluations' results as well as the institutional evaluations' results and the ranking results of our methodology (including successive g-index scores and h-index departmental scores). In Table 4 we present comparatively the classes that each of the 17 Romanian sociology departments fell into following the evaluation results of the alternative versus official ranking methodology as well as the modifications and their magnitudes.

Table 3. *Comparison table among the alternative ranking and ARACIS quality evaluations*

Department of Sociology	Aggregate alternative ranking	Research	Teaching & learning	ARACIS program evaluation*	ARACIS institutional evaluation**	Global ARACIS evaluation***
U București	5.47	4.10	1.37	3	4	7
UBB Cluj	3.76	2.88	0.88	3	4	7
UAIC Iași	3.19	2.11	1.08	3	4	7
SNSPA	3.10	2.21	0.90	3	4	7
U Oradea	1.97	1.08	0.88	3	3	6
U Alba Iulia	1.89	1.23	0.66	3	4	7
U Vest Timișoara	1.86	1.11	0.75	3	4	7
U Saguna Constanta	1.80	1.05	0.75	1	3	4
U Hyperion	1.76	1.05	0.71	2	2	4
U T. Brasov	1.59	0.72	0.87	3	4	7
U Ovidius Constanta	1.51	0.70	0.81	3	4	7
U Spiru Haret	1.50	0.70	0.80	3	2	5
ULB Sibiu	1.49	0.71	0.77	3	4	7
U Petrosani	1.42	0.71	0.71	3	4	7
U Craiova	1.35	0.73	0.63	3	4	7
U Dunarea de Jos Galați	1.33	0.70	0.63	2	4	6
U Petre Andrei Iași	1.13	0.35	0.78	1	3	4

* Where 1 stands for *Lack of confidence,* 2 stands for *Limited confidence,* 3 stands for *Confidence.*
**Where 1 stands for *Lack of confidence,* 2 stands for *Limited confidence,* 3 stands for *Confidence* and 4 stands for *High confidence.*
*** Sum of program and institutional evaluations

Table 4. *Comparison table among the official and alternative rankings*

Department of Sociology	Aggregate alternative ranking	Class of the program based on the alternative ranking	Class of the program based on the official ranking	Modifications and magnitude
U București	5.47	A	A	↔
UBB Cluj	3.76	B	A	↓1
UAIC Iași	3.19	B	B	↔
SNSPA	3.10	B	C	↑1
U Oradea	1.97	C	C	↔
U Alba Iulia	1.89	C	C	↔
U Vest Timișoara	1.86	C	B	↓1
U Saguna Constanta	1.80	C	E	↑2
U Hyperion	1.76	C	E	↑2
U T. Brasov	1.59	D	C	↓1
U Ovidius Constanta	1.51	D	E	↑1
U Spiru Haret	1.50	D	E	↑1
ULB Sibiu	1.49	D	B	↓2
U Petrosani	1.42	D	C	↓1
U Craiova	1.35	D	C	↓1
U Dunărea de Jos Galați	1.33	D	C	↓1
U Petre Andrei Iași	1.13	D	D	↔

Table 5. *Correlation between the official and the alternative rankings (including class E cases of the official ranking)*

			alternative ranking	official ranking (including class E)
Spearman's rho rs	alternative ranking	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	**.476***
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.027
		N	17	17
	official ranking (excluding class E)	Correlation Coefficient	**.476***	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.027	.
		N	17	17

Table 5 shows the correlation (based on Spearman's rho coefficient) between the ranking classes of the alternative methodology and the ranking resulted from the official methodology. The ranking class is an ordinal variable that has been computed depending on the ratio of the department score to the highest score. Thus departments that have scores >=75% of the highest score are assigned in class A; departments ranging between 50% - 75% are class B, 30% - 50% class C, 10% - 30% class D and departments below 10% are class E. In the alternative ranking no department actually scores less than 10% of the highest score, therefore the range is between A and D classes.

Table 6*. Correlation between the official and the alternative rankings (including class E cases of the official ranking)*

			alternative ranking	official ranking (excluding class E)
Spearman's rho rs	alternative ranking	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	**.619***
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.012
		N	17	13
	official ranking (excluding class E)	Correlation Coefficient	**.619***	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.012	.
		N	13	13

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Table 6 shows the correlation between the ranking classes of the alternative methodology and the ranking resulted from the official methodology when class E cases have been excluded pairwise as missing variables from the analysis. The reason for excluding class E cases rests with the fact that, in the official methodology, the cases have been included in this category on completely different criteria than the rest of the classes: departments which declared lower than 5 members or departments which had not completed ARACIS evaluations. Since their inclusion in this class was based on different criteria, it makes more sense to exclude them from the analysis and consider these as missing cases in the analysis. The correlation coefficient (r_s = .619, p< .05) is higher than in the analysis including these cases (r_s = .476, p < .05).

Results and Discussion

Our research focused on the Romanian departments of sociology brings to the fore some interesting insights and results. Firstly, using an alternative ranking methodology, with a smaller number of variables and indicators, we produced a ranking output which is highly similar to the output produced by the official ranking methodology that was carried out by the Romanian Ministry

of Education during 2011 throughout the Romanian higher education system. For instance, both the official ranking methodology and the alternative ranking methodology pinpointed the same three best Romanian departments of sociology: University of Bucharest, Babes-Bolyai University and „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași. Moreover, overall the correlation coefficient between the two alternative rankings is $r_s = .619$ ($p < .05$) when we exclude the class E casses which have been assigned on the basis of different criteria.

Secondly, we also identified a covergence between the research ranking produced by our methodology indicators and the teaching and learning ranking. We can therefore very accurately predict the teaching and learning performance of a single sociology department on the basis of its research performance and viceversa. Put it differently, knowing the best sociology departments from the research point of view is a strong indicator as to make judgements concerning the best sociology departments from the teaching and learning point of view. This reveals that, at least with regard to our population of sociology departments, the concept of quality is rather unidimensional and there is no actual differentiation between departments in terms of research and teaching respectively.

Thirdly, as shown in Table 3, the ARACIS peer (mostly qualitative) evaluation results have an extremely low level of variation. 13 out of the 17 Romanian sociology departments received the maximum grade in the qualitative peer evaluation for their internal inputs, process and outputs/ outcomes aspects (i.e. *High confidence* for institutions and *confidence* for programs). Only two departments have been certified with *limited confidence*, while other two have not passed the accreditation and are in liquidation (and are thus marked with *lack of confidence*). Yet, the qualitative peer evaluations done by ARACIS are by no means supposed to generate rankings, but just the certification of fulfilling some minimal thresholds for program accreditation. Limited confidence actually means that some criteria are not fulfilled and, although the program is allowed to function, remedial actions shall be taken and another visit is scheduled in 2 years (compared to the regular reaccreditation that is after 5 years when a *confidence* level is awarded). Thus, by their very purpose, the ARACIS evaluations are meant to assure compliance with certain thresholds; these evaluations level the playing field by only certifying the accreditation standards rather than attempting at further differentiating the programs.

Supporting our initial hypothesis, these results portray a poorly differentiated population of sociology departments in Romania. On the one hand, there is a clear convergence between the research and education indicators showing that departments do not follow different development paths, do not „specialize" themselves on teaching and research, but rather all follow the same established model, some more successful than others. Thus there is no horizontal differentiation which would have resulted in different rankings on research and education respectively. On the other hand, there is some vertical differentiation between the top 4 sociology departments and the rest of the population. There is, however, little vertical differentiation among the rest of 13 departments that all struggle to compete with the top ones along the same type of indicators.

The alternative methodology that we have applied only used a nine of indicators (the most important ones being the succesive g-index for measuring the research output and the size of the department and student/teacher ratio for measuring the teaching and learning quality). These are much fewer compared to the very long list of indicators along four categories (i.e. research, teaching, community engagement and institutional capacity) which had been used in the official ranking. One may wonder how come a parsimonious methodology can produce the same results than a much thorougher evaluation along different dimensions. The answer may lie in the isomorphic characteristic of the higher education departments in general and sociology in particular. Within an organizational field that is highly ismorphic either applying a large number of indicators or just one indicator will produce the same results because of the low horizontal differentiation of the population under study. We do not set to analyze here why HEIs and departments have become highly homogeneous, as it has been done elsewhere (Miroiu and Andreescu, Vlăsceanu et all, Păunescu et all). In this article, we only set to analyze the similarities between the rankings produced using different methodologies (the complex official methodology and the parsimonoius alternative approach), different criteria

(research and teaching) and different approaches (quantitative and qualitative). We nonetheless explain the high correlation between these evaluation results on the grounds of the actual low horizontal and also vertical differentiation of the sociology departments and thus the limited diversity of the higher education landscape in this particular study field.

Conclusion

The population of the Romanian sociology departments reveals high levels of homogeneity both vertical and horizontal. Nonetheless, there is quite a sharp vertical differentiation between the four top departments (and mostly the two top) and the remaining 13 departments; the split is sharper on the research indicators than the teaching indicators (though both reveal a rather dichotomic distribution). It should also be mentioned that within the departments, there is the same pattern where a few individual members have g indexes considerably higher than the rest. The high homogeneity of a large core with a few individual "outliers" at the top of the ranking is a pattern that is also replicated in the population of individuals. These findings suggest that we have a rather unidimensional concept of quality that lies behind all evaluation models we have used and that is pursued in a quite similar manner at the level of the population of sociology departments. The development strategies and management "recipes" seem to be shared among the various departments since most of them end up quite similar. This fact may be due to the similar incentives associated with accreditation and financing that all departments are exposed to, indistinctively. There are, however, reasons for the sharp vertical differentiation at the top of the ranking; these may be related to intrinsic practices within the older, high reputation university departments. Yet, apart from those, the rest of the departments seemed to mimic one development strategy which led to common profiles and approximately common quality levels. The accreditation and financing policies very much contributed to the current homogeneity of the field.

Our methodology based on successive g-indexes for the sociology departments revealed this structural pattern: a large homogeneous core with a few departments detached at the top. More importantly though the data suggest there is no actual horizontal differentiation. This is why a more

Annex 1

The code system used to label the Romanian departments of sociology

Code of the department	Full name of the department
UB	Department of Sociology, University of Bucharest
UBB	Department of Sociology, Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca
UAIC	Department of Sociology, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași
SNSPA	Department of Sociology, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
Oradea	Department of Sociology, University of Oradea
Alba Iulia	Department of Sociology, University of Alba Iulia
Șaguna Cța	Department of Sociology, Andrei Șaguna University of Constanța
Hyperion	Department of Sociology, Hyperion University
UTBv	Department of Sociology, Transylvania University of Brașov
Ovidius	Department of Sociology, Ovidius University of Constanța
Spiru Haret	Department of Sociology, Spiru Haret University
Sibiu	Department of Sociology, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
Petroșani	Department of Sociology, University of Petroșani
Craiova	Department of Sociology, University of Craiova
Dunărea de Jos	Department of Sociology, Dunarea de Jos University of Galați
Petre Andrei	Department of Sociology, Petre Andrei University of Iași

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