

The Romanian University of Cluj and the Academic Community from the United States of America (1919-1941): An Overview of Early Contacts

Florin Nicolae Ardelean

The Archive of Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Email: florin.ardelena@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract: The Romanian University of Cluj made constant efforts to establish and consolidate a constantly expanding network of cooperation with similar institutions from Europe and even beyond the borders of the “old continent”. The long process of international affirmation began shortly after the Romanian University was organized in Cluj, at the end of the First World War. The tradition of “western education” among Romanian intellectuals facilitated the first institutional contacts with Western European Universities, especially from France and Germany. Such a tradition was missing in relation with the North-American academic community. Nevertheless, the first contacts with American higher education and research institutions were initiated during the interwar period.

In this article the impact of American universities will be analysed, as a model of institutional organization, during the early years of the Romanian University of Cluj. In the first decades of the 20th century American universities were perceived as an innovative model, different from the traditional rigidity of European universities, based on functionality and social involvement. In the second part of the article the focus will be on identifying the various means of academic cooperation and their influence on the teaching and research process in the University of Cluj: academic mobility, the access to American scientific literature, the exchange of publications between the University of Cluj and similar institutions in the U.S.A., conferences and other scientific events, the presence of professors from Cluj in American scientific societies, etc.

Keywords: international cooperation, academic mobility, Romanian University of Cluj, higher education, scientific research

The Influence of the American Higher Education System on the Romanian University of Cluj During the Interwar Period

In the early 20th century, American institutions of higher education were perceived, especially by their European counterparts, as having a distinctive character. Universities in the U.S.A. had established a tradition of balancing the teaching and research mission with a social mission. This specific character was already in development during the Colonial Era, and was determined by the strong link established between teaching institutions and the communities they were serving (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Latter, in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, technical disciplines became common in the curriculum of many American colleges and even in universities. Often research activities were linked to practical applications (Rüegg, 2004; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Thus, American universities were described as having a functional, pragmatic and social oriented model of institutional organization. This was also the perception among some of the first professors of the Romanian University of Cluj during the interwar period (Breazu, 2019, p. 149).

Vasile Pârvan, one of the most influential founders of the Romanian University of Cluj, was among those who favoured the so called “Anglo-American” University model. He often expressed his belief that education and society were strongly interconnected, and proposed a project of organizing the new university in Cluj according to the college system in the United States of America (Pușcaș, 2003). This project was never implemented but it remains a testimony of the increasing popularity of American higher education among Romanian intellectuals.

Contacts between the two academic communities were encouraged by the consolidation of diplomatic relations between Romania and the United States of America. A significant moment in this process was the visit of Queen Mary of Romania in U.S.A. in the year 1926.

Several professors from the University of Cluj had direct contacts with scholars from American universities. Some of them travelled to the U.S.A. on various occasions and were able to obtain first-hand information about the higher education system in this country. Back in

Cluj they shared their experience with the entire academic community and sometimes with the larger public. Lectures and publications based on the professional experience gained during travels abroad were quite common during those days. Mihail Zolog, from the Faculty of Medicine in Cluj, was among those who enjoyed such a professional experience. He travelled to Boston, in the summer of 1925, as a fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation. There he studied hygiene at Harvard School of Public Health. He returned to Cluj after one year, very impressed with the teaching and research activity performed at Harvard. Practical activities and field experience are mentioned among the most innovative aspects of methodology in this institution of medical education. During his stay in the U.S.A., professor Zolog visited various locations in eight different states from the East Coast, as part of the teaching program. He describes in great detail the various courses he attended: sanitary engineering, demography, nutrition, etc. He was also very impressed with the social impact of American higher education and research in the field of hygiene, mentioning their efficient methods of water purification, the reduction of child mortality by 70% and the eradication of typhus epidemic (Zolog, 1927).

Petre Râmneanțu, a professor from the Institute of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, was among those who made direct contact with the North-American academic community during the interwar period. When he returned home from his travels, he held a public lecture during a meeting of the Romanian-American Association from Transylvania, on the topic of American Universities. Professor Râmneanțu underlined the distinctive character of the American universities, which, in his opinion, excelled in “educating people with a strong sense of community.” Another interesting aspect, mentioned in his lecture, was the atmosphere of familiarity in student-professor relations, radically different from the rigidity that defines this relation in European universities. An important objective of American education was to form “good citizens”. This was also a very important issue for the American society, given that many students were immigrants or descendants of families who had recently moved to the United States of America (Râmneanțu, 1946).

On 21st October 1930, prof. Iuliu Hațieganu gave the ceremonial lecture at the beginning of the new academic year, on the topic of mental and physical hygiene for students. Prof. Hațieganu, at that time

Rector of the University of Cluj, underlined the importance of physical education as a factor of balance in the everyday life of students. To support his point of view, Hațieganu referred to American and British universities and their interest in ensuring an optimal physical condition for their students, and the exceptional results of these universities in various sports competitions: "Let us be inspired by the example of Anglo-American universities, which, at the beginning of every academic year, open their lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, but also their sport fields, everything that leads to perfecting the mind, cleansing the soul and strengthening the body." (AUC, 1930-1931).

Another particularity of the Anglo-American university model, which was encouraged at the University of Cluj, was the idea of providing psychological assistance for students. This type of assistance referred to: "... guidance for the organization of scientific and intellectual life, therapy and the hygiene of mental activities..." (AUC, 1935-1936). In 1936, the Rector of the university, Florian Ștefănescu-Goangă, together with Dimitrie Todoranu (Stan, 2018) and Mihail Zolog, wrote a volume entitled *Îndrumări Universitare* [Academic Guidelines] that dealt with several problems of student life: hygiene, physical education, professional orientation and techniques of intellectual work (*Îndrumări Universitare*, 1936).

The University of Cluj and the Rockefeller Foundation

The Rockefeller Foundation played an important role in establishing the first contacts between the Romanian University of Cluj and the academic community in the United States of America. At the end of the First World War, this foundation was actively involved in helping communities all over Europe, to overcome the negative effects of the war. They offered support mainly in improving the medical care system and the medical research.

At the end of the academic year 1922-1923, the University of Cluj was visited by Henry Eversole, a representative of the Rockefeller Foundation, from the Paris division. In the years following the Peace Conference in Paris, doctor Eversole travelled to Eastern Europe and visited several countries including Bulgaria, Turkey, Hungary and Romania (Schneider, 2002). In Cluj, doctor Eversole was impressed with

the progress made by the university in its few years of activity since its foundation. A small donation of 171 dollars was made during the same year. In 1924 a new donation of 250 dollars and a significant number of American journals were sent by the Rockefeller Foundation to the University of Cluj (AUC, 1922-1923).

In 1930, with the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation, institutes of hygiene and public health were organized in Cluj, București and Iași. An institute of statistics was organized in the same year as well as the Caraiman Health Center in București (Râmneanțu, 1945, 18).

In the decades following the end of the First World War, most Romanians who studied in America received financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation (Nastasă, 2006). Grants and fellowships were also offered to scholars who chose to study in other European universities. Mihail Kernbach, who later became a professor of legal medicine at the University of Cluj, received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation allowing him to study in Berlin, Halle, Graz, Lyon and Zürich (Maftai, 1992). George Sofronie, a professor of international law at the University of Cluj, studied in Geneva, London and Paris with the support of the same foundation (AUC, 1939, p. 39.)

The Network of International Cooperation of the University in Cluj (1919-1940)

International recognition was one of the most important missions assumed by the Romanian University of Cluj. The Inauguration Ceremony held at the beginning of February 1920 was a first symbolic display of the wide international support given to this new higher education institution. The Romanian Royal Family was accompanied to Cluj by representatives of several diplomatic missions in Romania and delegates from many foreign universities (over 60 European and American universities were represented or sent their greetings) (Stan, 2015, Crăciun, 1930-1933). The first foreign speaker was the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States of America, Charles Joseph Vopicka (Crăciun, 1930-1933, Breazu, 2019). It was a symbolic gesture meant to encourage the political and cultural ties between the two states.

During the interwar period, the contacts of Cluj with American universities were limited because of the intellectual tradition established among Romanian scholars, who favoured French and German universities, but also because of the geographic distance between Romania and the United States of America. This aspect is clearly revealed in an analysis made by Professor Petre Sergescu regarding the international relations of the University in Cluj, during the period 1926-1935. The well-known mathematician and science historian from Cluj identified 91 foreign professors and researchers who held lectures in Cluj during the above-mentioned period. More than half of them (47) represented French institution. The other 44 came from various European countries but also from the United States of America (8 – United Kingdom, 5 – Switzerland, 5 – Italy, 5 – Czech Republic, 5 – U.S.A., 3 – Poland, 3 – Spain, 3 – Belgium, 2 – Germany, 1 – Yugoslavia, 1 – Austria, 1 – Holland) (Sergescu, 1937). Arthur Andrews, professor at Harvard University, was one of the American intellectuals who visited the University Ferdinand I in the academic year 1930-1931. During his stay in Cluj he held three lectures: “Romania and the United States of America – a comparative study of the main trends in their history”, “The Foreign Policy of the United States of America” and “A Comparison between American and Romanian institutions” (AUC, 1930-1931).

An impressive network of international cooperation was established by a collective from the Faculty of Sciences in Cluj who edited the prestigious journal *Mathematica*. 111 scholars from all over the world wrote articles for the first 12 tomes of this journal. More than half of them were foreigners: 44 came from Romania, 26 from France, 20 from Poland, 4 from Belgium, 3 from the United States of America, 3 from Yugoslavia, 2 from Germany, 2 from Czech Republic, and one each from Bulgaria, Greece, India, 1 Italy, 1 Peru, and Russia (Sergescu, 1937).

The state of the international academic cooperation in Cluj is also reflected by the amount of foreign scientific literature that reached the libraries of the university. Between 1925 and 1935 a great number of foreign books and journals were obtained through interlibrary exchange programs: 18,203 volumes from France, 4,747 volumes from Germany, 748 volumes from Switzerland and 341 from the United States of America (Sergescu, 1937).

All these examples show that there were consistent relations, at an institutional level, between the University of Cluj and American universities, although they did not reach the level of influence exerted by French universities or other similar European institutions.

Transfer of Knowledge – Access to American Scientific Publications

An important way of building an international reputation, especially in the field of scientific research, was by gaining access to prestigious publications from famous universities and research institutions around the world. At the same time, scientific journals edited at the University of Cluj made constant efforts to establish collaborations with foreign scholars. In this regard, various Faculties and Institutes from Cluj made significant progress compared to their first years of activity.

At the end of the 1920, Romanian scholars from the Institute of the History of Medicine in Cluj were among the foreign correspondents of *Medical Life*, New York. Several members of the staff from the Psychiatry Clinic published the results of their research in *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, New York (AUC, 1929-1930).

In 1931, *Mathematica* was regularly exchanged with 42 foreign journals from all over the world, including several American publications: *Publications in Mathematics of the University of California*, Berkeley; *Bulletin of the American Math. Society*, New York; *Mathematical Publication Providence*, Rhode Island; *Annals of Mathematics*, Princeton (AUC, 1930-1931).

Coriolan Petreanu, professor of Art History at the University of Cluj, published several articles on Transylvanian art and artistic educations in the prestigious American journal *Parnasus* (Sabău, 2010). His main contact across the Atlantic Ocean was a former colleague of his from the University of Vienna, the well-known American art historian John Shapely (1890-1978). Petreanu was also in correspondence with Alfred Salmony, professor of Oriental Art at Mills College, California (Sabău, 2010).

A remarkable network of cooperation was established by the scientific staff of the Botanical Garden and Botanical Museum of the University of Cluj. In 1922-1923, their journal was exchanged with

many similar publications all over the world, including some that were issued in the U.S.A.: Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record, Bulletin of the New York Botanical Garden, Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden (St. Louis), etc. (AUC, 1922-1923). Cooperation with American botanical gardens was also a source of acquiring new plants for the Botanical Garden and Museum in Cluj. Thus, in 1929, 92 specimens were received from the Brooklyn Botanical Garden (AUC, 1929-1930). In the following years, such exchanges continued with other American institutions: Cambridge University (Massachusetts), Missouri Botanical Garden (St. Louis), Smithsonian Institute and Harvard University (AUC, 1930-1931) (AUC, 1934-1935).

Academic Mobility

Cooperation with North-American universities created excellent opportunities of professional development for professors from the University of Cluj. Direct contact with the American higher education system ensured access to some of the most recent methodologies in research and education that were transferred and adapted in the young Romanian University.

In addition to Mihail Zolog and Petre Râmneanțu, who were mentioned in the first part of this article, there were several other professors from Cluj who travelled to the U.S.A. in the decades between the two World Wars. Iuliu Moldovan, from the Faculty of Medicine in Cluj, travelled to the United States of America in 1930-1931. He visited many universities, observing the organization of hygiene and social hygiene institutes (AUC, 1930-1931). Ioan Nițescu, a professor of the Institute of Physiology of the University of Cluj, took part in the International Congress on Physiology, held in Boston, between 19th and 24th August 1929. His presentation was later published in the *American Journal of Physiology*. On his return to Cluj he held a two-hours lecture, sharing his scientific and cultural experience that took place across the Atlantic (AUC, 1929-1930). Virgil I. Bărbat, the founder of sociological research at the University of Cluj, travelled to the United States of America in order to extend his knowledge in this rather new field of research. One of his first monographs, based on his American

experience was: *Imperialismul American. Doctrina lui Monroe* [*American Imperialism. The Monroe Doctrine*]. Inspired by the social role assumed by American universities, Virgil Bărbat was among those who initiated the University Extension (*Extensiunea universitară*) as an efficient mean of disseminating scientific knowledge to the larger public. In 1931, he was elected member of the *Association of American Political Studies* (Pop, 2003, Breazu, 2019) (AUC, 1930-1931). Nicolae Mărgineanu received a Rockefeller fellowship for two years, 1932-1934. During his stay in the United States of America he attended lectures at several universities: Harvard, Yale, Colombia, Chicago and Duke. He was particularly interested in observing the new trends and methodologies in psychological research (Mărgineanu, 2002).

The examples mentioned above illustrate the various contexts of academic mobility towards the U.S.A. They also highlight the importance of academic mobility as a way of aligning to new trends in scientific research and education.

Student Mobility

During the interwar period, the mobility of Romanian undergraduate students was limited due to material obstacles and the lack of programs meant to encourage scholarly travel.

At the beginning of the academic year 1922-1923, a special commission of professors from Cluj was assembled with the purpose of choosing a Romanian student for a scholarship in the United States of America. This initiative came from the Ministry of Education. A student from the Faculty of Letters was chosen on this occasion but there are no other mentions about such commissions in the following years (Bud, 2017).

There were, however, students born in the United States of America who studied at the University of Cluj. Although we do not have a very detailed background for each of the students that fit this very particular group, it is safe to assume that most of them were descendants of Romanian families, from Transylvania, who migrated across the Atlantic Ocean during the previous century. This was the case for a Romanian student who graduated at the University of Cleveland, Ohio, and requested the recognition of his American diploma (Bud,

2017). In the academic year 1930-1931 there were five students born in the United States of America enrolled at the University of Cluj. Two were attending the Faculty of Law, one the Faculty of Medicine and the other two at the Faculty of Letters (AUC, 1930-1931). A few years later, their numbers increased considerably. The Faculty of Law had eleven students who were born in the U.S.A. during the academic year 1934-1935. In the same period, the Faculty of Sciences had seven American students while the Faculty of Medicine had three (AUC, 1934-1935).

The Romanian University of Cluj was not able to attract more foreign students during the interwar period because it was a young institution of higher education, and its international reputation was just beginning to grow. Nevertheless, the presence of Romanian students born in the United States of America was an encouraging sign, which was showing the willingness of Romanian immigrants to be educated in their native language.

Access to American Scientific Societies

Membership in prestigious international Scientific Societies was considered an important professional achievement. It was, at the same time, an efficient way of establishing connections between academic communities and institutions around the globe. The excellent results of professors and researchers from Cluj were being noted by many Scientific Societies from Europe, but also from the U.S.A. Among those who earned positions in American Scientific Societies there are: George Vâlsan (American Geographical Society) (AUC, 1922-1923), Ioan Popescu Voitești (American Association of Petroleum Geologists) (AUC, 1923-1924), Victor G. Cădere (American Geographical Society) (AUC, 1934-1935), Valeriu L. Bologa (American Association of the History of Medicine) (AUC, 1934-1935) and Gheorghe Spacu (American Chemical Society) (AUC, 1934-1935).

Conclusions

During its first decades of existence, the Romanian University of Cluj managed to establish lasting relations with the American academic

community. These relations were further developed in the following period in spite of political obstacles like World War II or the communist regime in Romania.

In the interwar period, contacts between the Romanian and the North-American academic communities were encouraged by a favourable political and diplomatic context. The initiatives of the Rockefeller Foundation were also very important in providing access to American education and to scientific research for Romanian scholars. At the University of Cluj, those who managed to establish the first contacts with American institutions were the members of the Faculty of Medicine, especially those from the Institute of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, professors Iuliu Moldovan, Petre Râmneanțu and Mihail Zolog. In time, contacts were established in other fields of research like psychology, art history, sociology, law etc. The social role of American universities was also an inspiration for the academic community in Cluj.

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