

## Chapter 7

# Promoting Gender Studies in Romania – Working in a Difficult Context

*Alina Tăriceanu*

### Abstract

During the last three decades or so, the introduction of gender studies into higher education in Romania as a field of teaching and research has proved to be a very uneven and sometimes precarious process. The notion of gender has not been properly integrated into scholarly research, and women's and gender studies have therefore been seen as an appendix to mainstream research in the humanities and the social sciences. This chapter aims at providing a meaningful picture of how gender studies have become part of the higher education system in Romania, what challenges have been met on the way and what future gender studies have in the education landscape. It also provides a comprehensive overview of the significance and importance of the TARGET project for the implementation of the first gender equality plan in the Romanian higher education system.

*Keywords:* Gender studies; gender equality plan; Romanian higher education system; research and innovation; quality evaluation criteria; activism

### Introduction

During the last three decades or so, the introduction of gender studies into higher education in Central and Eastern Europe (Romania included) as a field of teaching and research has proved to be a very uneven and sometimes precarious process (Văcărescu, 2012, p. 25). The notion of gender has not been properly integrated

---

**Overcoming the Challenge of Structural Change in Research Organisations:  
A Reflexive Approach to Gender Equality, 125–141**



Copyright © 2022 by Alina Tăriceanu.

Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence.

Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this book (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> 26th April 2021, signed by Angela Wroblewski and Rachel Palmén.

doi:[10.1108/978-1-80262-119-820221008](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80262-119-820221008)

into scholarly research, and women's and gender studies have therefore been seen as an appendix to mainstream research in the humanities and the social sciences (Daskalova, 2010). Gender studies have long been considered a borrowed concept from Western culture that did not fit the social and political realities of former communist Eastern European countries. Its association with feminist ideology made it even more blurry in terms of the public perspective on the significance of a research field that allows women to express their views and interests.

In the Western world, gender studies have been part of higher education for more than 40 years, and their implementation came as a natural consequence of the political and civic environment. The realities of women's struggle for civic and political rights in Western countries (especially the United States) became the academic and theoretical basis of gender studies (Văcărescu, 2012, p. 27). There was therefore a natural relationship between activism, social movements and politics and the way they became theorised by academic research. After the fall of communism, the Central and Eastern European countries were faced with a totally different reality. The socialist ideology, implemented for more than 50 years, claimed to have removed any kinds of inequities and to have created equality between men and women. The goals of this ideology were mere utopias, a sort of 'Jack of all trades' meant to provide a solution for every problem that the individual might face. The substance, meaning and aims of socialism were never attained, and it became an umbrella under which the traditional roles, gender stereotypes and sexism were maintained. This led to a paradoxical situation in the early years after the fall of communism: acknowledging the reality and accepting the need for change in institutions, practices and policies and, at the same time, rejecting feminism as a 'dangerous ideology' for conservative societies, claiming that it is too early for such profound change or that 'we are not ready for it yet' (Văcărescu, 2012, p. 28).

The aim of this chapter is to provide a meaningful picture of how gender studies have become part of the higher education system in Romania, what challenges have been met on the way and what future gender studies have in the education landscape. To do so, we focus our attention on the following questions<sup>1</sup>:

1. Did gender studies draw their energy from the social and political factors in Romanian society?
2. What were the initial goals of gender studies and what are the current goals?
3. What is their degree of theoretical elaboration and development?

---

<sup>1</sup>All these aspects were discussed and analysed within the *Aspasia* Discussion Forum on women's and gender studies in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe (CESEE). The idea came from a roundtable on gender studies in CESEE organised by the editor of the academic journal *Aspasia*, Maria Bucur, at the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) in Philadelphia in November 2008. The result of this forum were five texts that were published in *Aspasia* in 2010 and provide a wide picture of the establishment and development of women's and gender studies in CESEE in the last two decades.

4. Is there any current connection between academic gender scholarships and activists in Romania?
5. What is the state of empirical research, and are there any specialised periodicals in women's and gender studies that are important for the development of this field?
6. What are the main obstacles and resistances to the integration of gender into scholarly research?

Providing answers to these questions and discussing every relevant aspect will help us to outline a state of the art in gender studies in higher education in Romania. This, in turn, will allow us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of gender studies and the possible solutions for upgrading their status from an appendix of the social sciences and humanities to an independent and academic field of research per se.

The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the role of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) in promoting gender studies in Romania. More specifically, it describes the first gender equality plan (GEP) in the Romanian higher education system – which was developed by ARACIS – as well as the significance and importance of the TARGET project in this context. Romania is a very specific case in this regard, since the GEP was drafted, implemented and updated within ARACIS, the government quality evaluation agency and not in a university or research institution. ARACIS was established in 2005 as a consequence of Romania's participation in the Bologna process, and its mission is to evaluate the quality of the education provided by higher education institutions and other organisations providing higher education programmes in Romania. ARACIS has therefore set the tone for GEPs and provided a guide for Romanian universities in generating their own GEPs. Furthermore, ARACIS has developed a new set of university evaluation criteria that include gender equality. Accordingly, Romanian universities are now requested to provide specific gender-related data and to address this topic in their internal documents and policies. The chapter goes on to document the TARGET project's contribution to gender studies in the Romanian context, its aims and objectives thereby, what has been accomplished so far and the main outcomes. It is not too far-fetched to say that gender studies in Romania have been indirectly strengthened by the participation of ARACIS in the TARGET project.

## **The Emergence of Gender Studies in Romanian Higher Education**

The emergence and institutionalisation of gender studies as a research topic and academic field around the world has followed different paths. In the Western world (Europe and America), they followed the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s and their activist agendas and fight for civil, social and political rights (Griffin, 2002). After the fall of communism (1989/1991), women's and gender studies entered the academic programmes in Central and Eastern Europe quite rapidly and in part also successfully (Văcărescu, 2012, p. 41). In the case

of Romania, studies have shown that feminism and gender-related issues were received with scepticism – and sometimes rejected – by the general media discourse and academia (Miroiu, 1998). The inclusion of gender studies courses and establishment of graduate programmes within the higher education institutions happened rather abruptly in the early 2000s (Băluță & Cîrstocea, 2003, pp. 207-212). Susan Zimmermann provides one explanation for this situation in her research on the institutionalisation of women's and gender studies in Central and Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space, arguing that:

the category of gender was used not only for its critical potential of examining existing social, economic and political asymmetries, but also for the means for imposing a specifically western model of liberal democracy and free-market economy. (Zimmerman, 2007, p. 137)

According to Zimmermann, the concept of gender was seen as a 'symbolic marker' of Western culture, democracy and political, social and economic transformation. Her research on the emergence of gender studies in the higher education systems in Central and Eastern Europe outlines three major stages in this process: (1) the efforts and activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international actors<sup>2</sup> to introduce gender studies in these regions; (2) the 'time of the Americans', i.e., (Zimmerman, 2007, p. 139) the period between 1995 and 2000 when most of the financial support for the establishment of gender studies courses and programmes came from North-American and Anglo-Saxon international organisations<sup>3</sup>, and the first steps to institutionalise gender studies within private higher education institutions were taken; and (3) the current phase of European Union (EU) influence, which started in 2000 and is still ongoing. The requirements put down by the Bologna Declaration (1999) accelerated the process of institutionalising gender studies as an academic research and teaching field.

Romania became part of the Bologna Declaration as a candidate country for EU membership. This triggered a number of reforms in the education sector: two cycles of study (undergraduate and graduate), three degree stages (Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral), transferable credits between European universities, high mobility of teachers, students and researchers, and inter-university cooperation at a European level. Besides these practical aspects of the Bologna process, the most important factors that led to the institutionalisation of gender studies in higher education in Romania were the conditions of the *aquis Communautaire*, whereby all candidate countries have to ensure that their education environment provides and promotes equality of opportunities, teaching and research in gender-related areas and mainstreaming (Văcărescu, 2012, p. 43). Romania's status as an

---

<sup>2</sup>The World Bank, The United Nations, The International Health Organisation.

<sup>3</sup>The Open Society Institute, The Rothschild Foundation, The Fulbright Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation.

EU candidate country also brought about legislative changes that affected the higher education system and influenced the emergence of gender studies programmes in Romanian universities and research institutes. One of the most significant legislative changes was the amendment of the National Constitution in 2003 to include provisions for equality among citizens, the non-discriminatory principle and the right to education granted freely by the state. The first legal provisions for ‘equality of opportunities between the sexes’ were made in Law No. 202/2002 on the Equality of Opportunities and Treatment between Men and Women (Legea nr. 202/2002, 2002). This was the first time that Romanian legislation had promoted ‘textbooks, university courses, guidelines for curricula which do not contain either sex discrimination aspects, or negative models and stereotypes regarding women’s and men’s roles in public and family life’. The 2011 Law on National Education also stipulates the principle of equal access to all forms of education, irrespective of ‘social and material conditions, race, sex, nationality, political and religious affiliation’ and ‘free of any form of discrimination’ (Legea nr. 1/2011, 2011). This law is particularly important for the emergence of gender studies programmes in Romanian universities because it contains an obligation for higher education institutions to promote and implement a code of ethics and professional deontology approved by the respective university senate. Since all Romanian universities are autonomous, the Law on National Education does not provide specific information on the minimum or gender-related requirements for such codes of ethics. The only university in Romania that had already included a reference to gender in its code of ethics prior to the amendment of this law was the National School of Political Sciences and Administrative Studies (SNSPA) in Bucharest. The decision-making body at this university was most definitely ahead of its time, promoting ‘the existence of an academic and residential community where each person’s dignity is respected in a climate free of any manifestation and form of harassment, exploitation, humiliation, contempt, threat or intimidation’<sup>4</sup> and stating explicitly that the SNSPA does not ‘allow misogynistic, racist, chauvinistic, xenophobe, homophobe manifestations and sexual harassment’.<sup>5</sup>

The legal provision that accelerated the process of implementing gender studies programmes in Romanian universities is found in Article 32 (6) of the National Constitution, which guarantees the autonomy of universities. This provision is maintained in the Law on National Education (1995; SPLASH-db.eu, 2014) and its subsequent amendment (2011). This principle is very important as it means that academics can advance and implement any kind of study programme – and decide upon the teaching staff and curricula – with the approval of university leadership alone.

Given the above, it can be said that gender studies appeared as a research/teaching topic in Romanian universities as a consequence of social, political and legislative factors. The political shift towards democracy and the desire to become

---

<sup>4</sup><http://snspa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Carta-SNSPA-2019.pdf>, p. 54. Accessed on 11 November 2019.

<sup>5</sup><http://snspa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Carta-SNSPA-2019.pdf>, chapter VI. Accessed on 11 November 2019.

a member of the EU triggered social and legislative reforms that allowed gender studies to become an active part of university curricula. Personal networks, institutional mechanisms and financial support are further explanatory factors for the establishment of gender programmes in Romanian higher education. The management positions of those academics who promoted gender classes or programmes (deans, rectors, senate members) were also very important for the success of such endeavours. This could, however, be read in both a positive and a negative way. The personalisation of the field could be read positively, as an opportunity to include gender studies in public higher education, and also negatively, as the field was deemed immature, academically illegitimate, with a need to be epistemically validated and with a lack of theoretical authority (Văcărescu, 2012, p. 45).

### **Past and Present Gender Studies Goals**

Another gender studies module was established at the Institute for Cultural Anthropology at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj in 2000. This was a two-year gender studies module for undergraduate students enrolled in different subjects and offered a graduation certificate (Văcărescu, 2012). A very important aspect that should be mentioned here is that these initial gender courses or programmes were funded exclusively from the state budget through the Ministry of Education. This is something specific to the Romanian case and does not correspond to the three-stage model proposed by Zimmermann (2007) in her research: all the classes, courses and programmes established and institutionalised in Romania before 2000 (in the ‘time of the Americans’) were funded using public financial resources.

Two further Master’s programmes with a gender studies curricula were established in 2003: the Master’s in Gender, Differences and Inequalities at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj and the Master’s in Socio-Cultural Gender: Interdisciplinary Approaches at the West University in Timișoara. In contrast, to their earlier counterparts, these two programmes benefited from external founding, especially American and British<sup>16</sup>. This was a double-edged sword for the programmes. On the one hand it gave them independence from the state budget, freedom to use international experts to teach certain classes and the possibility to buy books and research materials. On the other hand, their mere existence was dependent on these external financial resources, and they were both discontinued when the funding stopped.

The initial goals of gender studies were those of the academics who had the courage to place them in the higher education landscape. One of the first and most important goals was to educate young students about gender-related issues and make them acknowledge the cultural and social construction of gender, recognise the traditional roles attributed to men and women and study Romanian society and its gender-related issues (Miroiu, 2010). Another was for academics

---

<sup>16</sup>Through the OSF, the University of Sussex and the University of Nijmegen.

to improve as researchers of women's and gender studies, become more specialised, get in touch with the large community of gender experts and go through a personal metamorphosis. 'All these women are self-made specialists, pioneers in the proper sense, working together to learn gender studies and feminism mostly from American and British scholarship' (Miroiu, 2010, p. 159). Just like any other education process, the one for gender studies aimed to form a new generation of experts, researchers dedicated to the study of this topic and academics who could promote gender studies to other universities. Since Romanian society was itself going through massive changes when gender studies began to be taught in its higher education system, another major initial goal was to educate the political actors and raise awareness of gender as a pivotal concept for public policies and legislation. Acknowledging the fact that the politicians cannot change everything, another goal of gender studies is to educate social workers and specialists for the non-governmental sector – people who can reach out to women in situations of distress, relate to specific issues and make a difference in society.

All of these initial goals are still part of the current agenda for gender studies in Romania. There is a constant need to grow, become better, gain experience and use it for the benefit of both the academic community and society. The academics involved in teaching and researching gender issues are willing to develop tighter communication between universities which provide gender classes or programmes, increase the number of publications and enhance the research on quantitative and qualitative approaches. A present goal of the people actively involved in gender studies is to become opinion leaders in the media and fight the stereotypes that are still promoted in mass and social media – with the higher purpose of generating new role models for future generations. The best way to sum up the current goals of gender studies in Romanian higher education is to quote one of its promoters:

...we also have obligations towards others, to the stakeholders of our theoretical production. As feminists, our stakeholders are not just our fellow human beings, but human beings *qua* women. We have, in a deep normative sense, a moral obligation critically to reflect upon women's access to freedom, rights, resources, to their access to the production of intellectual knowledge and political expertise. Does our social world represent women's views and interests? Do women fully and equally participate in the design of all social rules and domains? Are they autonomous subjects in a substantive sense? These are, I think, our main issues in the Western and westernised world, as beneficiaries of first- and second-wave feminism. Being on the lucky side of history, living after communism and in the European Union, we also have a moral and intellectual duty to a *global sisterhood*. (Miroiu, 2010, p. 161)

In the following, we outline the path that gender studies took to become part of the academic environment in Romania. The process was relatively quick and started with the introduction of gender components in some undergraduate and

graduate courses in the social sciences and humanities in several Romanian universities in the early and mid-1990s (Văcărescu, 2012).

The University of Bucharest had several faculties where gender and feminism classes were taught between 1993 and 1995: the Faculty of Sociology, the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures and the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication Studies (Văcărescu, 2012). Other universities throughout the country also started to provide courses, modules and graduate programmes, such as the West University in Timișoara and Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. In 1998, the first Master's in Gender Studies was established at the National School of Political Sciences and Administration in Bucharest.

## **Degree of Theoretical Elaboration and Development**

When addressing the theoretical elaboration and development of institutionalised gender studies in a higher education system, studies indicate that the following six basic phases should be considered (Griffin, 2005, pp. 89-90):

1. The activist phase
2. The establishment phase
3. The integration phase
4. The professionalisation phase
5. The disciplinisation phase
6. The autonomy phase.

It should be noted here that this is just a theoretical model – there is no obligation for these phases to occur chronologically and there could be situations where a study and research field finds itself in more than one stage. Furthermore, some studies claim that no European country has yet reached full institutionalisation of women's and gender studies (Văcărescu, 2012, p. 47). There are also several indicators for estimating the level of theoretical elaboration, development and institutionalisation of gender studies: the number of chairs or professors and lecturers; the presence of autonomous women's or gender studies centres or departments; the academic standing of the teaching and research staff involved; the number and variety of undergraduate and graduate degree programmes; the number of disciplines involved in women's or gender studies; the amount and type of financial support; the research capacity; the recognition of the discipline by the higher education decision-making bodies (Griffin, 2005, pp. 90–91).

In order to assess the level of theoretical elaboration and development of Romanian gender studies, we looked at the educational offer provided within each curriculum. When the first gender classes were introduced in the Romanian higher education system, they were very elective and included gender issues in philosophy, sociology and social work, feminist literary criticism, and gender and media. They were all part of the enthusiasm for a newly discovered field of research, a niche that was worth exploring (Văcărescu, 2012, p. 48). With the passing of time and the specialisation of Romanian researchers in the larger European field of gender studies, new classes and academic perspectives were integrated



into higher education: the construction of gender in advertising, women's history in Romanian society, gender discourses in arts, women and politics, and feminism and political ideologies.

The only Master's programme in gender studies in Romania – the Master's in Politics, Gender and Minorities at SNSPA in Bucharest – is rich in theoretical content. The main areas of research and courses for its students are:

- History of gender and the feminist movement. Ștefania Mihăilescu, who teaches this course, is a leading expert in Romanian feminism from 1815 until 1948 and has published four volumes as well as introductory studies on the topic (Mihăilescu, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006). Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu, two leading researchers in the field of gender studies, co-edited a book on gender approaches in Romanian political thought. New professional historians are rediscovering the feminist past through historical archives (Alin Ciupală, Roxana Cheșchebec, Ghizela Cosma, Carol Căpită and Simona Stiger as well as many others from younger generations; Miroiu, 2010).
- Feminist theory and the theory of gender. These areas of expertise are covered in the work of five specialist: Otilia Dragomir, Laura Grunberg, Daniela Roventă Frumușani, Gabriela Blebea Nicolae and Anca Jugaru.. There are also some significant publications (e.g. *The feminist lexicon*) that include concepts and authors from around the world but also specific Romanian contributions to feminist theories and movements.
- Other classes provided within the gender studies curricula in Romania include women's rights, gender and the media, discrimination and equal opportunity policies, gender and education, gender and pop culture, gender and globalisation, minority rights, ethnic minorities, and the Holocaust. The academics who run the SNSPA Master's programme have made special efforts to include all these in their own curricula. The curricula are flexible and selected by the academic staff, depending upon the available human resources at the time. All lectures and classes in the programme are prepared and delivered by specialists. The interest<sup>7</sup> shown by students towards specific topics and subjects related to gender can also shape the curricula, with some classes being developed further and others being given up or postponed until another generation of students enrol.

## Links Between Academic Gender Scholarship and Activists in Romania

Since gender studies are a very recent subject in the Romanian higher education landscape, it is fair to say that most of the academics and experts in this field started their careers as activists or militants for women's rights. This does not

---

<sup>7</sup>This is usually measured by the number of student theses and dissertations on gender-related topics.

mean that the field of gender studies in Romania is still in its activist phase but simply that it takes time to produce a new generation of experts or activists. Since the number of students is relatively small (around 10 each academic year), it is only logical that the number of activists is also quite small.

The generation of women who introduced gender studies into the Romanian higher education curricula played the role of a ‘Jane of all trades’ (Miroiu, 2010, p. 161) since they were actively involved both in academia and in civic society. This connection between gender scholarship and activism is better observed at the level of the gender studies programme at NSPSAS. Most of the professors and researchers who teach classes in this programme are also actively involved on a civic level. Renate Weber, for example, was a well-known human rights activist and President of the Open Society Foundation (OSF) in Romania. She is now a Member of the European Parliament. In addition to her professorship, Liliana Popescu was the leading figure in the Civic Education Project, Vice-President of the Romanian Political Science Association and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Coordinator for Programmes for Women in Bucharest. She organised a large protest against domestic violence in April 2000, which was encouraged by and featured prominently in the mass media. Laura Grünberg is well known for her civic actions as the President of Ana, the first Romanian gender-related NGO. Mihaela Miroiu is well known for her public activities against gender discrimination, for building NGOs and higher education programmes, and as a columnist for the journals *Curentul* (‘The mainstream’), *România liberă* (‘Free Romania’) and *Revista 22* (‘The 22 review’) (Miroiu, 2010). In 2000, in order to offer coherent civic and political actions to complement outreach and research activities and make room for the new generation of feminists, the staff at SNSPA created the FILIA Centre for Gender Studies and Curriculum Development as an NGO offspring of the gender studies programme. FILIA’s presidents, Otilia Dragomir, Ioana Borza and Oana Băluță, have become influential experts and lobbyists. Oana Băluță, Alice Iancu and Alina Dragolea have gained strong reputations for their expertise and effective protests against discrimination and as lobbyists in the Romanian Parliament.

These examples clearly show that there is a strong connection between academic scholarship and gender activism in Romania. Moreover, the current research and teaching staff at SNSPA are also members of the women’s civic movement, while activists in turn become students and then experts in gender studies. This proves that there is a high degree of internalisation of gender studies within Romanian society. The academics are aware of the realities faced by women in society, whose experiences become the basis of research and gender theories.

## **Gender Studies: Empirical Research in Romania**

The research capacity of a gender studies programme is one of the most relevant indicators for estimating its level of institutionalisation. This includes access to financing, data and statistics as well as the capacity to develop research teams, coordinate dedicated tasks and get involved in outreach activities as part of the

participatory observation method. Empirical research within the gender studies field in Romanian higher education is quite significant, and a number of studies have already been published. These include a nationwide survey that revealed a pertinent image of grass-roots patriarchy, which was carried out by the OSF and Gallup International, coordinated by Renate Weber and Mihalea Miroiu and published by the OSF. This survey was followed by qualitative research on gender and public policies in post-communist Romania (Vladimir Pasti), gender and rural work (Valentina Marinescu), gender stereotypes in mass media (Laura Grünberg, Ana Bulai and Irina Stănciugelu), gender and political interests in Romania (Alice Iancu, Oana Bălută and Alina Dragolea), gender stereotypes in education (Doina Ștefănescu, Mihaela Miroiu, Laura Grünberg, Otilia Dragomir, Elena Bălan and Cristina Ștefan), and gender and the political parties (Andrei Taranu and Amalia Herciu). Important empirical research was also coordinated by Laura Grünberg and Liliana Popescu, including an analysis of the evolution of Romanian feminism authored by Maria Luiza Vasilescu. A recent empirical research project on feminism and gender in Romania was coordinated by Oana Bălută, while another on women and poverty was overseen by Alice Iancu and Alina Dragolea.

Other current research focuses on the impact of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on gender policies in the region (Olivia Todorean), gender and nationalism in the Republic of Moldavia (Rodica Capatici), the gender impact of retirement policies in Romania (Cristina Mocanu), Roma women (Crina Morteau), the effects of the (non-) application of the Law on Equal Opportunities in Romanian politics (Monica Munteanu), comparative evolution of the institutions dedicated to Equal Opportunities in Europe (Ioana Borza) and gender and migration (Mihaela Cosescu). The Centre for Partnership and Equality in Bucharest, which is part of the Open Society Institute, has also conducted significant empirical research on domestic violence, gender in the labour market and equal opportunities. Important support for such research has been provided by the UNDP in the region. One enduring weakness in this empirical research is that it has been neither sufficiently comparative nor broadly enough focused on Eastern Europe.

Most of the studies and empirical research mentioned above were published in a series of works on gender studies coordinated by the Romanian scholar Mihaela Miroiu at one of the country's most prestigious publishing houses (Polirom). Polirom has published a total of 27 books on this topic to date as well as several translations of international works. The gender studies programme in Cluj also benefited from the support of the publishing house Desire. Cosima Rughinis, an academic at the faculty of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Bucharest, started a new journal dedicated to Romanian sociologists, the *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, which published special issue on 'Men and Women' in 2010. The only Romanian journal dedicated entirely to feminism and gender studies is *AnALize*, which has been published since 1997 under the auspices of *AnA*, with two to three issues edited each year by Laura Grünberg. This periodical has, however, suffered financial difficulties and did not always appear regularly (Miroiu, 2010).

## **Main Obstacles and Resistance to the Integration of the Field of Gender into Scholarly Research**

Although gender studies have become part of the Romanian higher education system more quickly than in other East European countries, the country still does not have a corresponding gender research domain per se. All the programmes that provide students with a gender studies curriculum are regarded as appendices of the social sciences, political sciences or humanities. These programmes are periodically evaluated by ARACIS using the same criteria as any other political science programme, with experts coming from the field of political sciences. By analysing previous qualitative research conducted with members of management and teaching staff involved in gender studies in Romanian universities, we determined that there are several obstacles and areas of resistance to the integration of gender into scholarly research (see the qualitative work done by Theodora Eliza Văcărescu, a lecturer in the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences at the University of Bucharest, i.e., [Văcărescu, 2012](#)).

The first major obstacle is the broad socio-cultural and political context that generates a negative perception of gender studies in the academic environment ([Văcărescu, 2012](#), p. 50). Romanian society still tends to define itself as traditional and conservative and finds it difficult to readily embrace Western concepts and mentalities. This definition is translated into the educational system, where specific established scientific patterns are very difficult to change or replace. For example, it is still widely believed that women should study medical sciences, education, psychology or the arts, while men are expected to study technology, IT, engineering or the military sciences.

Another obstacle identified in this qualitative research is the low level of self-realisation of gender studies ([Văcărescu, 2012](#), p. 51). Gender studies have limited legitimacy in Romanian universities and face external contestation especially from experts working in disciplines with strong theoretical background. Gender studies in Romania are still perceived to be below the scientific standards of the West as they constantly seek to attain visibility and validation by addressing the social, political or civic aspects of women's everyday life. The most common reaction of staff members and academics towards gender studies is that there are already other fully established research fields – e.g., sociology, anthropology and the political sciences – that can address, explain and make predictions about gender-related issues. Another contributing factor to the general reluctance towards gender studies as a research field is its incorrect association with feminism. People, including those in the academia, find it difficult to acknowledge that feminism means political action and activism, and is not a university's preoccupation. Feminism can become a research topic, but activism falls under the responsibility of society, NGOs and individuals ([Văcărescu, 2012](#), p. 51). Gender studies are also facing a paradox in terms of experts and institutionalisation. All those staff members who oppose the integration of gender studies into academic research fields claim that there are no real experts who can launch and sustain such a programme. As we have already shown, most of the academics involved in gender studies are self-made experts, people who graduated in other disciplines then

specialised in gender studies over time. Therefore, if there are no experts, there cannot be a self-sufficient research area, and no real experts can be generated. This is a rather vicious circle that cannot be overcome without the willingness and collective efforts of academia and staff. The small number of students, generational gap between researchers, financial aspects and low rates of cooperation on the university boards also count as resistance towards the integration of gender into research. The responsibility for the future of gender studies lies mostly with young researchers and teaching staff. People with strong beliefs, who stand up for their convictions, can be very influential in society and generate meaningful change. The ethics of non-discrimination, equality between people, acceptance of differences and individual autonomy are universal principles that should be present in any research field, not just gender studies.

### **The Higher Education System and the First GEP – TARGET at ARACIS**

The fragmented landscape of gender studies in Romanian academia received a boost in 2018 when ARACIS, the only quality assurance agency for higher education in Romania joined the TARGET project to implement its first GEP. This marked a premiere in the Romanian education system and was a very interesting endeavour, since ARACIS is a government agency and not a university or research institute. Since gender studies have been a research priority for Romanian universities, the first GEP should really have been an academic endeavour. Nevertheless, this GEP marked a very important benchmark for the entire system and sent a clear message that gender equality should be a quality standard for all higher education institutions in Romania. The implementation of TARGET at ARACIS was a lengthy process, marked by different achievements and minor setbacks, and involving not only the entire staff at the agency but also representatives of Romanian universities.

ARACIS's participation in the TARGET project is very important as it is expected to lead to a set of actions aimed at achieving gender equality in science and in all the activities of the organisation. Therefore, one of the first steps taken by ARACIS at the start of the project was to elaborate a GEP that would critically assess the situation in the organisation and correctly identify the main directions that could be followed. The gender equality audit served as an instrument for starting a sustained, reflexive and participatory institutional transformation process aimed at enhancing gender equality within ARACIS and introducing the topic in Romanian higher education. Two main factors were considered in the elaboration of the GEP: the institutional structure and the gender equality context in Romania. The analysis of the external environment ranked Romania lower than other European countries in terms of gender equality. There were several domains related to gender equality where Romania scored rather low, namely work, knowledge, money, time and power. In terms of institutional structure, the GEP aimed at analysing the main gender-disaggregated data available in the organisation, looking at the structure of ARACIS and sex-disaggregated data at all levels of activity. The GEP should ultimately provide a detailed image of the

gender balance within the institution. An ongoing dialogue between ARACIS and the Romanian universities was set up in order to modify the methodology, guides and standards for the quality evaluation process. The aim thereby was to include gender on the list of evaluation criteria for universities. The representatives of the universities were asked to provide ARACIS with details of an umbrella course on gender policies that would be disseminated throughout the entire higher education system. This action demonstrates the important role that ARACIS assumes in promoting gender equality within the research environment and influences the GEP implementation in the long run. When the modification of the evaluation criteria and official methodology became effective, the composition of the permanent commissions at ARACIS would also change. They would then include gender experts with the specific task of evaluating the gender-related criteria provided by each university. In February 2020, ARACIS organised the Fourth Capacity Building Workshop in Bucharest. For the first time since the implementation of TARGET, ARACIS decided to invite the main Romanian universities to attend this event for promoting the TARGET tools and objectives. Our main goal was to expand the community of practice, to send a strong signal to the higher educational system that gender equality is an important quality criterion, that ARACIS is promoting gender-related policies and that we want to work closely with the academic community in order to modify the evaluation methodology by adding gender-related criteria. A working group was set up at ARACIS that includes members of the TARGET project and the university professors invited to the workshop. The main task of this group is to formulate a course on gender policies and demonstrate how it can be introduced into the curriculum.

The GEP has become a referential tool for ARACIS and serves as the basis for developing future gender equality policies. It is the main document taken into consideration when conducting gender audits at ARACIS and drafting periodical evaluation and assessment reports within TARGET. The GEP was made available to the relevant stakeholders through the ongoing activities and dissemination channels of the TARGET project (i.e., meetings, conferences, institutional capacity building workshops). Periodical monitoring and self-assessment reports were also used to provide stakeholders with access to the GEP, which is an internal document at ARACIS that can be modified as the situation requires. The fact that ARACIS is a public institution governed by national laws, makes it rather difficult to frequently change its official documents. The institution's work (human resources, decision-making and evaluations) mostly follows the principle of non-discrimination rather than gender equality. The fact that it receives public funding and is thus governed by law in all of its areas of work helps indirectly to promote gender equality as it ensures equal pay for people in the same positions, equal access to information (for members of the decision-making body), equal access to training and equal access to the social benefits established by law.

The most important institutional strategy that ARACIS is currently working on addresses the drafting, implementation and dissemination of a gender policy paper. Current Romanian education law – which covers both ARACIS and the

universities – does not stipulate the need for a GEP. Therefore, the time was right for ARACIS to modify its evaluation methodology and criteria and ask universities to have and implement their own GEPs. When the gender policy paper at ARACIS has been completed, it will be disseminated to the universities as a good practice guide, along with the recommendation to implement such documents in order to have gender-related data. By doing this, ARACIS can induce the universities to implement GEPs and promote them as quality criteria for further evaluations. The working group mentioned above is responsible for maintaining a permanent dialogue between ARACIS and the universities, in order to obtain the best ideas for the gender policy papers and GEPs that will be implemented by the higher education system.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis has shown that the introduction of gender studies as a field of teaching and research in higher education in Romania included has proven to be a very uneven and sometimes precarious process. The notion of gender has not been properly integrated into scholarly research and women's and gender studies have therefore been seen as an appendix to mainstream research in the humanities and social sciences. The fall of communism faced Eastern European countries with a paradoxical situation: acknowledging the reality and accepting the need for institutional, practical and policy changes and, at the same time, rejecting feminism as a 'dangerous ideology' for conservative societies, claiming that it is too early for such profound change or that 'we are not ready for it yet'. The analysis showed how gender studies have become part of the higher education system in Romania, what challenges have been met on the way, and what future they have in the educational landscape. The social and political factors in Romanian society, the initial goals of gender studies, their degree of theoretical elaboration and development, the current link between academic gender scholarships and activists in Romania, the state of empirical research and the existence of specialised journals on women's and gender studies are the main elements that provided us with a state of the art of gender studies in Romania.

A very strong connection between academia and gender activism can be exploited for the benefit of gender studies. The women's civic movement is mostly comprised of current teaching staff and gender researchers as well as the activists who become students and later experts in gender studies. This proves that there is a high degree of internalisation of gender studies within Romanian society. The academics are aware of the realities faced by women in society, and their experiences become the basis of research and gender theories. Romanian society still tends to define itself as traditional and conservative, with difficulties in readily embracing Western concepts and mentalities. Moreover, this definition is translated into the education system, where specific established scientific patterns are very difficult to change or replace. The strength of gender studies is that it is a non-conventional, modern and attractive subject to many social categories. People with strong beliefs who stand up for their convictions can be very influential in society and generate meaningful change.

During the implementation of TARGET, ARACIS has become actively involved in promoting gender ideas both within the institution and in all the activities that it coordinates. It has therefore gathered relevant data about gender-dedicated study programmes that are available in the Romanian higher education system. An institutional workshop was organised with the professors and staff involved in these programmes to discuss the opportunities they provide as well as the main threats and disadvantages encountered in Romanian society in terms of gender topics. The conclusions and recommendations of these meetings became part of the GEP proposed by ARACIS. Moreover, ARACIS has assumed its role in changing and improving the evaluation criteria for universities and promoting gender equality as a necessary standard for a quality education process. Through these activities, ARACIS is reaffirming its role in promoting gender equality in higher education in Romania.

## References

- Băluță, Ionela, & Cîrstocea, Ioana (Eds.) (2003). *Direcții și teme de cercetare în studiile de gen din România [Research themes in gender studies in Romania]*. București: Ecole Doctorale en Sciences Sociales, Europe Centrale Și Colegiul Noua Europă.
- Bologna Process Committee. (1999). Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on 19 June 1999 (The Bologna Declaration). [ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf)
- Daskalova, Krassimira (2010). The birth of a Field. Women's and gender studies in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe: Introduction. *Aspasia. International Yearbook of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History*, 4(1), 155–156. doi:10.3167/asp.2010.040110
- Griffin, Gabriele (2002). Co-option or transformation? Women's and gender studies worldwide. In Heike Fleßner & Lydia Potts (Eds.), *Societies in transition – Challenges to women's and gender studies* (pp. 13–31). Studien interdisziplinäre Geschlechterforschung 4. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Griffin, Gabriele (Ed.). (2005). *Doing women's studies. Employment opportunities, personal impacts and social consequences*. London: Zed Books.
- Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*. (2010). Volume 1(1). Universitatea din Bucuresti, Facultatea de Sociologie si Asistenta Sociala. Retrieved from <https://www.ceeol.com/search/journal-detail?id=362>. Accessed on November 19, 2021.
- Legea nr. 202/2002. (2002). Legea privind egalitatea de sanse intre femei si barbati [Law on equal opportunities and treatment between men and women]. *Parlamentul României*. Retrieved from <https://www.equalrightstrust.org/sites/default/files/ertdocs/Legea%20nr.%20202%202002%20privind%20egalitatea%20de%20sansa%20intre%20femei%20s.pdf>. Accessed on November 19, 2021.
- Legea nr. 1/2011. (2011). Legea educației naționale [Law on National Education]. *Parlamentul României*. Retrieved from [https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/fiSiere/Legislatie/2021/LEN\\_2011\\_actualizata\\_2021.pdf](https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/fiSiere/Legislatie/2021/LEN_2011_actualizata_2021.pdf). Accessed on November 19, 2021.
- Mihăilescu, Ștefania (2001). *Emanciparea femeii române. Studiu si antologie de texte [Emancipation of Romanian women. Study and anthology of texts]*. Vol. I: 1815–1918. București: Editura Ecumenica.



- Mihăilescu, Ștefania (2002). *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte* [From the history of Romanian feminism. Anthology of texts]. 1838–1929. București: Polirom.
- Mihăilescu, Ștefania (2005). *Emanciparea femeii române. Studiu și antologie de texte* [Emancipation of Romanian women. Study and anthology of texts]. Vol. II: 1918–1948. București: Editura Ecumenica.
- Mihăilescu, Ștefania (2006). *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte* [From the history of Romanian feminism. Anthology of texts]. 1929–1948. București: Polirom.
- Miroiu, Mihaela (1998). Feminismul ca politică a modernizării [Feminism as political modernisation]. In A. Mungiu-Pippidi (Ed.), *Doctrină politică: Concepte universale și realități românești* [Political doctrine, Universal concepts and Romanian realities] (pp. 252–74). Iași: Editura Polirom.
- Miroiu, Mihaela (2010). A mind of our own. Gender studies in Romania. *Aspasia International Yearbook of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History*, 4, 157–167. doi:10.3167/asp.2010.040110
- Parlamentul României (1991). Constituția României [The Romanian Constitution]. Retrieved from <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=339>. Accessed on November 19, 2021.
- SPLASH-db.eu. (2014). Policy: Law 84 of 24 July 1995, the law of education (Information provided by Cornelia Muresan, Paul-Teodor Haragus & Adina Rebeleanu). Available at <https://splash-db.eu>
- Văcărescu, Theodora-Eliza (2012). (Un)fashionable disciplines: gender studies in higher education in Romania. Integration or autonomy? *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*, 7(2), 25–63. Retrieved from [http://rjsp.politice.ro/sites/default/files/pictures/theodora\\_eliza.pdf](http://rjsp.politice.ro/sites/default/files/pictures/theodora_eliza.pdf). Accessed on November 19, 2021.
- Zimmerman, Susan (2007). The institutionalization of women's and gender studies in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union: Asymmetric politics and the regional-transnational configuration. *East-Central Europe/ L'Europe du Centre-Est*, 34(1), 131–160+388+398. doi:10.1163/18763308-0340350102007