AN OVERVIEW OF ACADEMIC CULTURE.
A STUDY ON LAW ENFORCEMENT EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

As any other organization, the university is subjected to the impact of social transformations, thus being forced to find solutions to problems and to adapt to the contemporary changes, which – most often than not – generate inner conflicts due to the hardships the university faces within society. Against the background of social changes and the alteration of values in current society, more and more often the role of the university – as an organization which contributes to the creation, perpetuation and preservation of culture – is heavily tried.

KEYWORDS: academic culture, characteristics and myths, academic culture typology, law enforcement education

1. The University and the Academic Culture

The ideal mission of the university can be summed up as follows: University has been a factor of culture and civilization, a factor of change and progress, a laboratory for the training of the national elites (Neculau, 1997).

Undoubtedly, due to the role it undertakes, university remains a *learning organization*, if we understand it as an organization which facilitates learning for all its members and it changes continuously in the learning process. Therefore, learning represents the foundation of the academic organization. As any other organization, university has to learn from its own errors, but also from its accomplishments, and in order to survive the changes from the outer environment it has to continually adapt. Thus, any kind of challenge can be surpassed through a learning process.

The organizations which can face the future will be those capable of transforming themselves and adjust their structure in consistence with the needs of the moment (Ion, 2008).

University takes on a unique identity due to its culture. The *academic culture* concept can be defined as the collection of deep beliefs, values, symbols, norms, habits and procedures transmitted to the new members of the organization as being adequate. This collection gives the university a distinct profile, differentiating it from other educational organizations.

2. Types of Academic Cultures

Organizations are different as humans are different. As there are no identical individuals, there are no identical organizations. Here a legitimate question arises: What makes organizations different? The answer to this question is as simple as

possible, if we choose to go along with the reasoning induced by the previous analogy. If people can be distinguished one from the other by those features which make them unique as compared to their peers, then what makes organization sdifferent from one another are those singular characteristics prevalent for each of them. People are unique by virtue of their own personalities. If for an organization culture represents what personality is for humans (Kilman, Saxton & Serpa, 1985), then what gives each organization their uniqueness and identity is exactly their organizational culture.

Therefore, as many types of organizations as many cultures there are. The attempt to identify the differences between organizations gave birth to cultural typologies. One of the most well-known typologies in the literature is Handy's (1993), which is illustrated below (Figure no. 1).

High formalisation

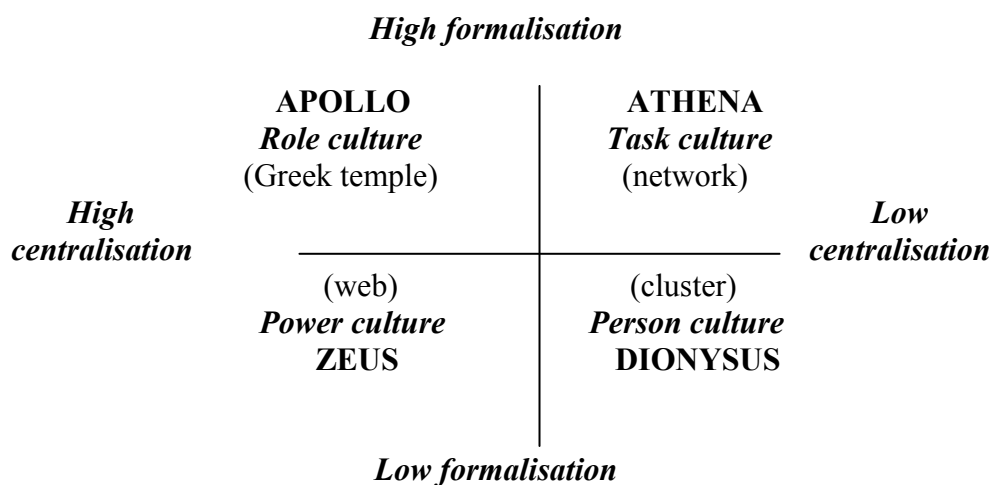|	**APOLLO** *Role culture* (Greek temple)	**ATHENA** *Task culture* (network)	
High centralisation			**Low centralisation**
	(web) *Power culture* **ZEUS**	(cluster) *Person culture* **DIONYSUS**	

Low formalisation

Figure no. 1 Organizational culture model (Handy, 1993)

The cultural model proposed by Ch. Handy was a landmark for some researchers of the academic environment who, as a result of an empirical study, proposed a typology of the academic culture differentiated according to two axes: *the organisational policy* and *the system of* *control of its implementation,* with two opposite poles ranging from *loose* to *tight.* The resulting academic cultures are: *collegium, bureaucracy, enterprise,* and *corporation* (Dopson & McNay, 1996) (Figure no. 2).

Policy definition

Loose

Collegium		**Bureaucracy**
Loose		Tight
Enterprise		**Corporation**

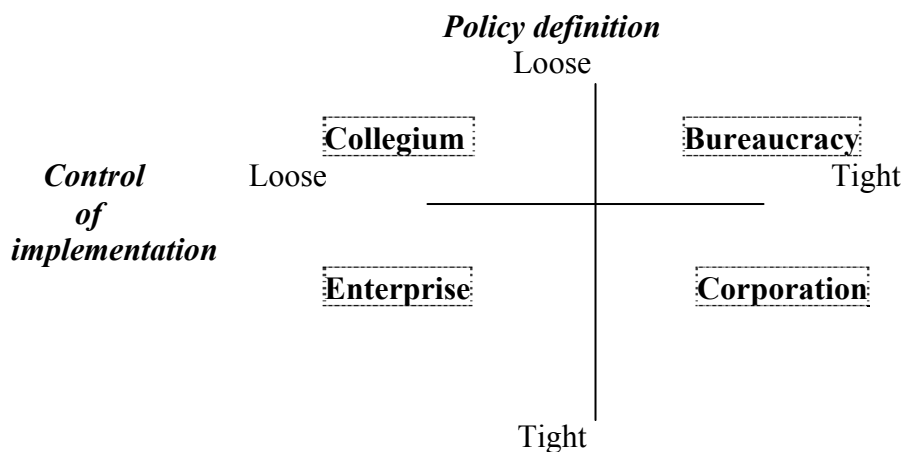*Control of implementation*

Tight

Figure no. 2 Models of universities as organisations (Dopson and McNay, 1996)

The four types of university cultures are distinguishable by the following general characteristics:

- o *Collegium* is the result of the organisation based on consensus (Handy, 1993), where individuals are entitled to be consulted and they have a considerable influence on the proposals for change due to the opposition right they are vested with. In this culture there is a transactional management, and the change occurs due to the power of persuasion, consensus and compromise.
- o *Bureaucracy* is founded on consensus formalised in committees and on the dominance of procedural power. This organization is not necessarily based on clear-cut policies, but rather on practical precedents and on general principles which condition behaviours. Managers rely on rules and regulations in the managerial act, and focus on the work agenda, report writing and control of the information flow.
- o *Corporation* allows academics to have control, being organised in flexible and dynamic working teams. Committees are reduced in number and dominated by managers. This cultural typology benefits from transformational leaders, who are charismatic, visionary and innovative.
- o *Enterprise* is characteristic to those universities whose goals are oriented towards the outer environment: the client and the community. In this type of culture the organizational goals are oriented mainly on the consensus between practice and policies with an emphasis on the information regarding market and the inner systems of information management. This culture is focused on commercial goals and is extrinsically motivated, which are rather unattractive values for academics. The strengths of this culture consist in the innovative capacity and the easiness of people coming from various cultures to work in a team.

Starting from observations of the Anglo-Saxon academic environment, Goodland proposes in his turn in 1995 a distinction between *university* and *college*, which are represented by two different types of cultures: *"the airport culture"* and *"the monastic culture"* (Ion, 2008).

Table no. 1

Types of university cultures (Goodland, 1995)

University – Airport culture	*College – Monastic culture*
✔ university is a transit place: students are enrolled annually and there is no entrance ritual; ✔ the rapport with the institution is a functional one; the students are admitted if they pay their financial obligations; ✔ the organization is not interested in the students' private life or their social interactions and the teacher – student relationhip is formal; ✔ the university does not have its own behavioural rules, except for the statutory law; the "double sanctioning" of both the law and the institution is utterly rejected; ✔ the meals are provided by catering services in exchange for a fee;	✔ colleges provide permanent membership, even after students have finished their studies; there are rituals and ceremonies, where even alumni are invited; ✔ the rapport with the institution is based on the candidates' merits; students are accepted if they meet the requirements imposed by the organization (a proper level of knowledge and personal background etc.); ✔ the organization is paternalistically interested in the students' lives, which takes the form of family-like relationships: students are invited to lunch or dinners by their tutors or they need permission to leave the school premises;

University – Airport culture	College – Monastic culture
✔ the opportunities for spending leisure time are an extension of those activities from outside the institution: concerts, watching TV etc.; ✔ social interactions are established at coffee houses or bars; ✔ the characteristic of this organization is anomy, which is tackled by counsellors, psychologists etc.	✔ there are clear-cut rules for what is or is not considered appropriate behaviour; the sanction consists in expelling or suspending the students who bring disrepute to the organization; ✔ meals are served in common and the services are paid in advance for a specified period; ✔ the opportunities for spending leisure time are oriented by the institution: there is a college choir or orchestra, sports teams, a students' magazine etc.; ✔ the library and even the chapel are keypoints in the organization, being socialization areas; ✔ the issue specific to this culture is alienation which occurs as an effect against the strict rules (see the myth about the students that escape at night, climbing over the institution walls etc.)

The *university* is conceived as an organization with an "airport" culture, where a multitude of services intertwine: educational, commercial, gastronomical and leisure time services etc. On the other hand, *college* benefits from a "monastic" culture, where the sense of identity and community is more strongly instilled to the members of the organizational community. The differences between these two types of cultures are illustrated in Table no. 1.

If we are to use the two taxnomies discussed above to analyse the culture of the higher education organization devoted to the initial training of prospective officers, the following conclusions can be drawn.

From a structural and functional perspective, the first taxonomy reveals that the culture of the law enforcement higher education organization is a *bureaucratic culture* as it is characteriyed by rules, norms, clear-cut provisions which regulate the organizational activity, there are general principles which condition the members' behaviours and the management resorts to well-exercised practices and procedures,

which have become precedents in organization, and it also puts an emphasis on the accomplishment of tasks and the objectives set by regularly requesting reports and by exercising a constant control over the organization's main activity and the information flow.

The same typology discloses the relative interference of the bureaucratic features with those belonging to *corporate culture* in the organiyation under analysis, due to the incipient nature of the organization's interest in scientific research within research projects. Being included in the higher education system, it may be viewed as an organiyation centred around research project teams, which are dynamic and flexible and due to their propensity for scientific research, they are also oriented toward the future, innovation, novel ideas and visions.

On the other hand, in the law enforcement higher education organiyation there are also feastures of the *college culture*. Thus, it is organized in university-like committees, such as The University

Senate and The Faculty Council, which are bodies with a role in the decision-making process regarding the academicenvironment and its members, decisions which are usually based on the consensual vote of some freely elected representatives of the teaching staff and the students.

Moreover, if we take a closer look at the academic curriculum and the students' practical training in this organization which are designed to meet the beneficiary's demands (the beneficiary is represented by the general and county police inspectorates within The Ministry of Home Affairs), as weel as the constant adjustment and upgrading of the syllabi so that they could cover the newly emerged situations or knowledge in police work, then it can easily be noticed that this organization shares traits of the *entrepreneurial culture*.

Undoubtedly these interferences with the four cultural typologies should not be viewed as general, but as relative cultural traits. Furthermore, we cannot posit that the organization under analysis meets all conditions to be fit in all four cultural types, but, contrariwise, the conclusion that can be drawn is that such an organization shares certain cultural features belonging to all four cultural typologies discussed above.

The second taxonomy is mainly focused on the type of rapport the students have with the higher education institution and reveals some of the significant differences between the culture of most Romanian universities and the law enforcement higher education organiyation, which is analysed. Thus, on the on hand, universities rather benefit from an *airport culture*, being characterized by the temporary membership, the absence of intergration and socialization rituals and ceremonies, by functional interactions, as well as by the students' complete freedom of movement and the absence of additional disciplinary rules except for those provided by the law.

On the other hand, the same typology of university cultures highlight that the law enforcement higher education organization is distinguishable from all other universities by its *monastic culture,* due to the fact that most of the characteristics of this culture can be identified in the organization. There are clearly defined rituals and ceremonies for the integration of new members into the community, for maintaining cohesion and reinforcing the academic community; there are also saymbols of cultural identity, clear-cut behavioural rules, sanctions for violating disciplinary rules, while human interactions are both formal and informal, for which reason the socialization takes place and the leisure time is spent in well-organized activities; there is also a feeling of commitment to the organization amongst its members as various activities are shared: students live in dormitories arranged on the school premises, meals are served in common, the study rooms are usually shared, the areas for spending leisure time involve group activities such as the football or tennis fields etc.

3. Characteristics of the Romanian Academic Culture

A study of The Educational Sciences Institute (2001), *"The Impact of the Reform Measures on the Educational Organization",* identifies a series of characteristics of the organizational culture of the preuniversity educational organizations, whose prevalent feature is *routine*. Extrapolating the cultural traits of the preuniversity education system to the academic environment, the author of the study *"Organizational cultures in the Romanian academic environmen*t*"* (Ilie, 2007) has identified some overlappings. Taking into account the observations of this study we shall resort to a *comparative analysis* between universities and the law enforcement higher education institution. Here are the most relevant characteristics of the academic milieu:

- *the uniformity*: universities usually differ from each other in terms of denomination; there are no cultural

characteristics that help identify or differentiate a university from another. From this point of view, the law enforcement higher education organization is an exception as here there are cultural elements such as hymn, emblem, symbols, uniform, cultural traditions etc.;

- *the tendency to imitate*: amongst Romanian universities there is a tendency to imitate the practices encountered in other West European universities; although it is rather reticent in implementing changes and it is in a relatively incipient phase, the law enforcement higher education organization tries to borrow academic practices met in other academic environments such as: the organization of international scientific conferences, encouraging the academic community members to access the European or structural funding through scientific research projects, the experience exchanges with similar organizations from other foreign states etc.;

- *the focus on the education provider, not on the beneficiary*: in Romanian universities there is a practice of introducing new courses to cover the teaching staff's quota with no heed to the students' options so as to observe the principle of "education centred on the beneficiary of the teaching act"; this practice of creating courses for teachers instead of creating them for the students' learning needs exists in the law enforcement higher education organization, with the onservation that here there is a need to adjust the curriculum to the requirements of the Ministry of Home Affairs or the beneficiary of the organization's graduates, represented by the general or county inspectorates of police, border police, gendarmerie or firefighters, which can impose the study of some knowledge areas

related to the law enforcement field, whose necessity is demanded by the legislative or European changes; as regards the custom of most universities of accepting a larger number of students than the organization's capacity and human resources, in the law enforcement higher education organization there is atotally different situation: the number of students enrolled per academic year is not decided by the institution, but by the Ministry of Home Affairs depending on the personnel necessities of the beneficiaries mentioned before;

- *the feeling of temporariness*: although the option of some young people for the academic career is most often founded on the academic aura of this environment, they see the academic teaching profession as being provisory – especially in the current economic and social conditions – until they can find a better paid job, though it cannot be denied that once they get into the academic environment and get the academic titles, some of them choose to stay in the university just for the sake of the intellectual effort invested; comparatively, until recently in the law enforcement higher education organization there was another situation: the stability offered by the job and the relatively decent salary were motivating factors, which allowed the continuity of personnel in the organization; in the current conditions this feeling of temporariness has pervaded this organization as well;

- *the closeness of the university*: this characteristic is based on a self-preservation spirit generated by the perception of universities that publicity brings along disadvantages rather than advantages, due to the tendency of mass-media to highlight the negative aspects of universities more than the positive ones; the law

enforcement traning organization is characterized by a *hermetic culture*, which means that there are organizational practices or customs which only members of its community are familiar with and only certain ceremonies or event are accessible to the public;

• *the generation gap*: unlike regular universities where the percentage of elder teachers is larger than the younger or beginner teachers, which brings about a difference in mentality between generations, in the law enforcement higher education organization the teaching staff is relatively young due to the 55 years of age as a maximum age of retirement; it is worth mentioning that here it is not the percentage that makes the difference as there are perceptible differences of mentality even between relatively close generations, but the differences are generated rather by the professional development, by the origin of the teaching staff either form an external or internal recruitment source (graduates of a military school or civilian faculty), by the statute held in the academic hierarchy, the position held in organization or the rank held in the military hierarchy; in both regular universities and the law enforcement higher education organization there is a big discrepancy between the salaries of superior teaching titles such as associate professor and full professor and the lower teaching titles such as lecturer and teaching assistant;

• *the feeling of inefficiency*: starting with the current changes produced in economy, including the law on the remuneration of the state budgeted personnel, the freezing of the promotion mechanisms, the salary cuts, the underfinancing of the educational system, in all universities the teachers have begun to experience the feeling of inefficiency

and uselessness of any intellectual effort or endeavour because of the lack of motivation.

To the characteristics discussed above we can also add the following:

• *the proliferation of the teachers' extra-university and extra-scientifical commitments;*
• *the modest remuneration of the academic teaching staff in the hierarchy of state budgeted personnel;*
• *the insufficient involvement in scientific research;*
• *the legislative ambiguity.*

4. Myths of the Romanian Academic Environment

Along time in the academic communities the so-called *myths of the academic environment* have emerged, which are really a synthesis of the university culture. Some of them still exist, others have already become obsolete or incompatible with the societal axiological changes, which inherently echo in the academic community.

The myths of the academic milieu highlight the prevalent characteristics of the three dimensions which make up the academic community: the university environment, the academic teaching staff and the students. In a study devoted to the analysis of the academic cultures in the Romanian educational environment titled "Organizational cultures in the Romanian academic environment" (Ilie, 2007), the author identifies the myths belonging to this educational area.

❖ *The myth of the social indispensability of university,* which is based on the belief that the social progress is inherently related to the contribution of the academic educational system. University is considered an elite organization, which ensures the scientific development of society.

❖ *The myth of the scholarship of the academic environment* consists in the belielf that the university prepares the

intellectual elites of our society and its members are interested in their own cultural and professional development, standing out through scholarship, academic value and spirit.

❖ *The myth of the Western models* refers to the propensity of the Romanian academic education system to borrow, more often without sound judgement, foreign forms, contents, methods and means, especially Anglo-Saxon ones, which are believed to be better than ours. This state of affairs often generates obvious incompatibilities, which are at odds with the tradition of the Romanian higher education system.

❖ *The myth of university nepotism* is a negative characteristic associated with the academic environment and is founded on the assumption that the access to an academic career is largely facilitated by a criterion such as the "inheritance" of the university positions.

❖ *The myth of the on-going educational reform* is founded on the idea that the socio-economic changes of the contemporary society impose the adjustment and transformation of the higher education system so as to meet the social demands.

❖ *The myth of the managerial decentralization* is based on a principle borrowed from the economic system into the educational area and it refers to the autonomy of the higher education organization to set its own mission, organizational strategies and to administer all kinds of resources.

❖ *The myth of the new technologies* indicates the ever more expanded concern of the academic educational system to keep up with and to use the new information and communication technologies, out of the belief that these can enhance the efficiency and the attractiveness of the teaching and learning process and, furthermore, that they can improve motivation.

❖ *The myth of the consideration owed to the academic statute* refers to the acknowledgement a university teacher enjoys both in and outside the academic environmet.

❖ *The myth of the role-model university teacher* starts from the assumption that the academic teacher is a model of Mitul profesorului universitar model of the highest erudition, culture and pedagogical and scientific knowledge.

❖ *The myth of the committed university teacher* reflects the belief that the university teachers are passionate about their teaching career, and also the area of scientific research they are interested in.

❖ *The myth of the hardworking student* indicates the student who is always concerned with learning in order to perfect his education, being aware of the importance of university in training students as humans and intellectuals.

❖ *The myth of the opportunistic student* is the opposite of the previous myth and it describes the features of an unmotivated student, who is exclusively interested in getting a university degree and high grades despite the minimum effort invested in learning.

All these myths can be transferred (with inherent particularizations) to the law enforcement higher education organization to a larger or smaller extent. In the following paragraphs we shall try to identify the most important myths specific to this cultural environment describing a few characteristics for each myth.

❖ *The myth of the high academic statute of the law enforcement higher education organization* is founded on the prestige of the institution and its unique characteristics among universities (it is the sole law enforcement academy in the country), as well as the aura given by the rituals and ceremonies aimed at perpetuating the organizational culture and also by the importance associated with the future police officer career.

❖ *The myth of observing the European standards and requirements* as regard

the theoretical and paractical training of the future police officers in order to meet the European demands imposed once our country joined the European Union.

❖ *The myth of the fron-rank student* is a variation of the "myth of the hard-working student" and it refers to those students who get the highest grades either in the theoretical fields of study or the practical training (meant to prepare the would-be police officers for the work-related situations, problems or contexts) or in sports competitions, who are given as positive examples in the academic community.

❖ *The myth of the bored student* may be viewed as a variation of the "myth of the opportunistic student", who losing their motivation or being disappointed by the academic environment prioritize the fields of study and are only interested in passing the exams and completing their studies, if possible, by investing a minimum effort and getting the maximum result, due to the fact that the final grades weight a lot in being assigned to a certain position upon graduation from the academy.

❖ *The myth of the specialists in various law enforcement fields* is founded on the belief that it is desirable that the teaching staff come from the ranks of officers with experience and seniority in police work and be speciaslists of law enforcement fileds of study such as forensics, criminal investigations, public order, pemitentiaries, fraud and economic crime investigations, to name but a few of the police specializations, in order to be able to provide the students with the best theoretical and practical training.

❖ *The myth of the importance of the position in the hierarchy and the police ranks* is a variation of the "myth of the consideration for the academic statute"; this myth is justifiable by the double statute of the teaching staff in such an organization; they are both university teachers and police officers (it's woth mentioning that a larger amount of importance is placed on the police rank, than on the university title);

❖ *The myth of the academic excellence* is based on the organization's aspiration to be competitive, which is unrealistic when it aims that all students be excellent in everything they do (there was often talk about the "imposed" need that the teachers should prepare students' "groups of excellence"), denying a very well-known premise which states that not all individuals benefit genetic or motivational data to excel in all fields.

❖ *The myth of tutoring and guiding the new-comers* either teachers or students or any other categories of personnel, which have to be integrated in organization; this myth starts from the idea that the new-comers have to be told what and how to do in order to become familiar with "how things are done in the organization"; furthermore, when it comes to the students, who are assigned a "tutor", this myth is intrinsically related to the idea of the organization's responsibility, and especially the teachers' responsibility, to contribute to the studnets' human and professional training.

❖ *The myth of the need of excercising constant control* on the members of the organization is based on the belief that the organizational efficiency depends to a large extent on the way the management controls the accomplishment of tasks, the performance of various activities and the individuals who are in charge with these tasks and activities.

❖ *The myth of nepotism* has become a universally valid myth in Romanian society; this myth takes on particular nuances in the law enforcement higher education organization as it is founded on the assumption that in order to be hired on a certain position in the organization it is sometimes needed to resort to "interventions" or "connections" or to a certain degree of relationship.

In the organizational culture of this institution there are sometimes stronger, other times frailer echoes of the other myths, strating most often than not from the same foundation. Thus, *the myth of the committed teacher* and *the myth of the role-model teacher* are universally valid myths in an educational organization and, therefore, they are specific also to the organization under study, even though they are less evident.

5. Conclusions

The study we have undertaken in order to identify the main cultural characteristics of the law enforcement higher education organization has led us to the following conclusions:

1. This particular kind of organization is distinguishable from other higher education organizations from a functional and structural point of view.

2. The organization and operation of the law enforcement higher education organization are a reflection of its culture. Thus, the special training of students for the future police officer career leaves a particular hallmark on its culture.

3. The culture of such an organization is clear-cut, reinforced by tradition, by preserving and perpetuating organizational symbols, ceremonies and practices specific to the police officer career and the military-like organizational environment.

4. As a military-lik eorganization, the culture of the law enforcement higher education organization reasserts as a strong, hermetic, but also selective culture, promoting bureaucratic values and principles.

5. From an academic point of view, the culture of such an organization is opposed to the culture of Romanian universities. The comparative analysis has revealed that this kind of organization is characterized by a "monastic culture" (college culture), whereas Romanian universities fit into the "airport culture" (according to Goodland's typology).

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