

CAMELIA BRAN – VÁMOSI TAMÁS

Framework of Lifelong Learning in Romania

I. The definition given in Romania to the concept of lifelong learning

The principle of lifelong learning (translated into Romanian from the French words “education permanente”) was mentioned for the first time in an official document in 1995 within the Law of Education, nr.84/1995 and within the republished Law of Education no.606/1999. According to this law “lifelong learning is organized by the Ministry of Education and Research in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and together with mass-media, religious institutions, folk universities, cultural foundation, another associations and institutions, in order to facilitate the access to science and culture to all the citizens whatever their age is, and to prepare them to properly respond to all the major changes appeared in society ”.

This approach reveals the longlife and life- wide dimension of lifelong learning and its role in a changing society. The principle of lifelong learning stresses the need of articulation between basic education and adult education within a coherent and coordinated system.

According to law no. 133 from 07/21/2000 regarding the Continuing Vocational Training Within the Educational System, “the lifelong learning organized within the educational system is developed with the help of the specific programmes initiated and organized by the public and private institutions with a specific activity in this field, by promoting social partnership, by using interactive methods, enhancing the role of multimedia approaches such as: distance education, computer assisted education, video conferences and others ”. The strong point of this approach consists in the fact that it is stimulated by the use of new technologies and alternative education. Unfortunately, this approach treats lifelong learning as, adult education, continuing education and not as an integrative principle referring to all the educational influences and actions that influence his life, from birth to death.

After serious debates at national level the 6 key messages of the Memorandum of the European Commission on Lifelong Learning have become objectives for Romanian lifelong learning. Within the First National Conference for Adult Education, that took place in Timisoara, Romania 2001, the participants stressed the importance of the key -messages number one: *new basic competencies for all* and number four: *valuing and recognising of the learning and life experience* for Romania.

In the context of the capitalistic economy which Romania is trying to promote after 1989, a lot of changes have occurred on the labour market: the companies require more and more people that can use ICT, that can speak foreign languages and which have strong abilities and competencies in practice labour fields. Unfortunately a lot of people do not have these basic skills. Especially people about 40 are more exposed to become unemployed because of the lack of these skills. It is the task of lifelong learning through adult education, to offer the opportunities for all

people to acquire these basic competencies and to be successfully integrated in the work place.

Although the Memorandum enhances two aims of lifelong learning: *promoting an active citizenship* and *developing measures for employment*, in Romania it can be said that the second one has priority. The rate of unemployment in Romania (10,3% in 2001, 6,8% in 2004 and 6,0% in March 2005) justifies actions for reducing it, but the civil society needs to be sustained throughout programmes whose aims must be the promotion of the social tolerance, the involvement of the citizens in the society's life.

II. The main aims of the lifelong learning strategy

In Romania there is not a coherent specific strategy for lifelong learning. Coherent strategies are developed regarding, the formal initial education (preschool education, primary, secondary and tertiary education) and adult education (especially continuing vocational training of the adults).

The aims of the preschool education system are:

- To assure normal and complete development of the preschoolers, by valuing their physical and intellectual potential, by taking into account their affectivity needs, their developmental rhythm and their main activity: the game
- To enrich the capacity of the preschoolers to get into relation with other children and adults, to interact with the environment.
- To support the preschoolers to acquire information, knowledge, capacities and attitudes requested in primary school
- To help the child discover his own identity and to build up a positive self image

The goals and aims of the general, compulsory education are related to the equality of the chances of all the young people to the acquisition of the basic information, skills, attitudes in order for them to act as creative people in society, to communicate well in real life situations, to participate in the social life, to adapt to different situations, to build for themselves a quality life, to use the new information technologies, to acquire a set of values which will guide their behaviour.

The strategies regarding secondary, non- compulsory educations are oriented towards three directions: theoretical, vocational and technological education and it is organized especially in the cities. The aim of superior secondary education is to offer a specialization for the pupils, specializations in concordance to the three directions mentioned above. Poor developed during the communist regime, theoretical education in high schools has experienced a great development after 198. The side effect is that a lot of pupils leave secondary education without a qualification. Thus, in 1997, 15% of the people between 20-29, 17% of the people between 30-39, 55% of the people between 40-49, 60% of the people between 50-59 did not have a qualification of upper secondary education (according to Key data on Education Data in Europe, 2000, p.194). These statistics reveal great demands for lifelong learning, in order to offer these people possibilities to acquire a qualification and to integrate themselves in the labour market.

Education in universities has known major changes in the last few years in this field, in teaching and evaluation approaches, in the curricula, in order for the universities to have a better adaptation to the international tendencies in education, to the changes occurred on the labour market. (according to the White Paper on the Reform process in Education, 1998). Although the number of people enrolled in tertiary education is increasing, 20,5% of people with ages between 18-24 leave

education. (According to the European Report on Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning, EC, June 2002, p.45)

Regarded for long time as the Cinderella of the educational system, the adult education has become in the past years more and more important and nowadays it is seen as a way for the adults to adapt to the changes on the labour market, to the changes in the society. According to the Governmental Ordinance no.129/2000 vocational training of the adults is “a national priority”.

According to the Governmental order no.3062 from 18.01.2000, adult education is a “special dimension of the lifelong learning” and its aims are: to develop the knowledge, the information, the competencies and attitudes that the adult needs in a particular moment in his life, in order for him to obtain an appropriate role and status in the society in that he lives”.

Adult education must be a priority in Romania because only 1,1% of the people with ages between 25-64 participate in education and training.(European Report on Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning, EC, June 2002, p.45). This low percentage reveals the fact that learning in Romania is not seen as an opportunity to have a better life and this is a real problem. Organized actions (such LLW) in order to promote lifelong learning are a must.

III. The contribution and involvement of national and local authorities in the lifelong learning strategy

As the strategies regarding initial education, higher education have been developed for a long time, we have to mention the strategies regarding adult education.

Romania has not yet elaborated a Law of Lifelong Learning. It exists only a project to be submitted to the National Parliament, but this project refers, in fact, to adult, continuing education.

In Romania, vocational training of the adults is seen as a priority (comparing it to the general adult education). The Romanian government has elaborated a Governmental Ordinance, no.129/2000 regarding the vocational training of the adults. This ordinance was approved and modified with the Law nr. 375/2002. According to this Law, the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Education and Research elaborate the national strategies regarding the development of human resources, including the vocational training of the adults. These strategies are elaborated taking into account the proposals of the National Council for the Vocational Training of the Adults, in accordance to the National Plans for Development and the governmental strategies. Expenditure on education is only 3,4% in 1999 share of GDP (European Report on Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning, EC, June 2002, p.45). Although the share of GDP for education is expected to be around 6% until 2007, co-financing sources for education must be identified and functional.

The National Council for the Vocational Training of the Adults is also responsible for the coordination in the entire country of the accreditation process of vocational training providers. At the level of each county a commission having as members: the Manager of the General Direction of Labour and Social Solidarity at the county level (as president of the commission), an expert from the county representative of the Ministry of Education and Research, an expert from the County Agency for the Employment; an expert representative of the main professional bodies at the county level, an expert, representative of the main unions of the county. This law

has just been approved, it isn't functional yet, but the vocational training providers want for it with interest. The national and local authorities and, in fact, all the society provide founding to the vocational training process through the budget of the unemployment assurance.

IV. The contribution and involvement of The National Association Of The Regional Centres For Adult Education to lifelong learning strategy

The National Association Of The Regional Centres For Adult Education includes 8 Regional Centres for Adult Education in Romania. These centres have specific aims in the field of adult education as a special dimension of lifelong learning. Each regional centre develops activities such as: methodological support for other adult education institutions (eg. Courses for the managers of the cultural houses, training of the trainers from adult education), counselling services for adults, courses (in the general education field or vocational training), creating scientific brochures, documents, materials related to the adult education, organizing conferences, seminars on different themes such as: ecological education, education for health, intercultural education, other activities in partnership with the local authorities and local economical agents, involvement in the international cooperation projects etc.

Lifelong learning Week, called in Romania "The festival of your opportunities" is also organized by these centres in the town and region in which they action. The National Association Of The Regional Centres For Adult Education is an interface between the Regional Centres, the national authorities and the community. It is a network between the regional centres, facilitating the communication process, the exchange of know- how and information between these centres.

Through their activities, the regional centres implement a piece of lifelong learning strategy in their local, regional community. They offer programmes required by the region and that is way, each regional centre has its one characteristic. The National Association Of The Regional Centres For Adult Education aims to be actively involved in the implementation of the national and local strategies regarding adult education. A big step will be that the representatives of the Association will become members of the commissions responsible for the accreditation process of the vocational training providers, at national and local level.

V. The contribution and involvement of professional associations in lifelong learning strategy

In Romania, some of the professional bodies are directly involved in the implementation of the lifelong learning strategy, especially in the vocational training and rarely in general adult or youth education. Such examples are: The National Union of the Craftsmen from Romania, Chambers of Commerce and Occupation, Chambers of Industry and Commerce who develop courses, especially vocation training for the adults. Other professional associations provide training courses and continuing education for their members (eg. The National Association of the Trainers from Romania), but there are no centralised data regarding this aspect.

VI. Institutional arrangements established to coordinate the lifelong learning strategy

The main institution invested with the implementation of this strategy is *The National Council for the Vocational Training of the Adults (NCVTA)*. This Council was

set up on the basis of the Law 132 from 07/20/1999. The council is an autonomous administrative authority with a consultive role in promoting the policies and strategies regarding adult education. It is a three-part authority including members of the public authorities (The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Development and Prognosis), the representatives of the main associations of the patronage and the main associations of the union. NCVTA has the task to evaluate the training needs in the field of the vocational training of the adults, to supervise the projects and law referring to the vocational training of the adults, to collaborate with other governmental and non-governmental, national and international institutions who action in the field of vocational training.

The National Agency for Employment and Vocational Training was set up on the basis of the Law no.145 from 07/09/1998. Some activities of the Agency are: to provide and finance vocational training services according to the national policies for employment and with the tendencies on the labour market and to offer counselling services for the unemployed people. The National Agency has in each county a representative institution called The County Agency for the Employment and Vocational Training responsible for the application and the finding of the solution for unemployed people in the county. The Agency finances courses for the unemployed people provided by any institution who acts according to the Agency rules. According to the National Plan of Action for the Fighting Against Unemployment, in 2001 in Romania there were 10,4% unemployed people (representing about 1 million persons). This percentage decreased in 2004 down to 6,8%. The National Plan of Action for the Fighting Against Unemployment wanted to facilitate the access of the unemployed to 393.000 job places through specific services such as:

- 26.000 through mediation
- 40.000 through job market
- 20.000 through grants for developing new work places within the small and medium enterprises
- 20.000 through stimulation of the employment of the graduates
- **28.5000 through vocational re-training**
- 3.900 through community service
- 11.700 through stimulation to start a small business
- 2.800 through employment of the unemployed by the Association of the Flats Owners
- 4000 through local interest programmes
- 3000 through other programmes.

As it can be seen measures are taken only for one third of the unemployed, and only 3% of the jobs are occupied due to the vocational re-training financed by the public authorities. Unfortunately, education it is not seen as a way to acquire new competencies necessary for a job.

As regarding the initial education, there are a lot of institutions, departments on the ministry level and on county level. Some of these departments are responsible for the continuing training of the teachers from the initial education. Eg. The Houses of the Didactical Body organises in each county training courses for teachers, on various themes.

VII. Examples of the pilot projects of programmes established by the public authorities

In the area of initial education, the Ministry of Education and Research develops very effective pilot projects in partnership with the Open Society Foundation. Project EDUCATION 2000+ developed by The Open Society Foundation has a great impact on the Romanian educational system. Through its aims and actions, the project sustains the reform initiatives and actions of the Ministry of the Education and Research through an open and flexible partnership. EDUCATION 2000+ aims: to promote the communication and coordination between the key institutions responsible for the implementation of the reform at local level; to respond to the educational needs of the Romany by creating efficient methods for a better integration of the Romany in the education and in the reform process.

The Education 2000+ Centre develops a lot of project such as:

- *Equal Opportunities* is a project who aims to improve the very difficult situation of the Roma children in Romania. The project has to cope with the implementing of a school development module, facilitating institutional exchange, and stimulating both Roma pupils and parents to involve in the school life. The project will be implement in 50 schools from 8 counties.
- The aim of *The Career Dream project* is to prepare the teenagers for choosing a career, using information, abilities and attitudes for making their own decision, for creating own future.
- The target group is approx.575 teenagers from 20 Centres Education 2000+ Romanian pilot schools, located in 7 counties.
- *The second chance project* is an experimental program that aims at preventing and debating the social and professional exclusion of the youngsters that have abandoned school for social causes. These should be able to complete their education so that they could enter the capacity exam and continue their studies in a vocational school.
- The target group are the youngster with ages from 14 to 25 years that have dropped out school for social reasons.
- The Centre develops other projects regarding education in the rural area, disadvantaged groups, etc.
- In the field of adult education there are no pilot project developed on governmental level, because nowadays the authorities work on the legal bases of adult education.
- The National Council for the Vocational Training of the adults has developed studies and researches regarding the adults educational needs.

VIII. Promotional activities and campaigns have been established to promote lifelong learning strategy

Adult Learning Week called in Romania *The Festival of your Opportunities* is the main campaign in promoting educational opportunities. Within this week, in Romania have been organized presentations of the job offers, conferences, presentations of the non-formal education offers, exhibitions of the artistic creation, books presentations, open doors, free access to the courses, counselling services for the participants, concerts, plays, dances.

In 2004 a big exhibition with educational offers was established within the biggest exhibition centre in Romania, ROMEXPO, Bucharest. The exhibition was organized by the Ministry of Culture and Cults, by The National Council for the Vocational Training of the Adults, by The Institute for International Cooperation of the Association of the Folk Universities from Germany- Bureau Romania, by the Folk Universities from Romania and by the National Association of the Regional Centres for Adult Education from Romania. The participants at the exhibitions were all kinds of schools, territorial representative institutions of the Ministry of Education and Research, Houses of the Didactical Bodies, Folk Universities, vocational training centres, museums, cultural centres, NGOs active in the educational field, clubs, prisons, etc.

This exhibition was, in deed, a coherent campaign for promoting lifelong learning. Like in other European countries, lifelong learning week is the only coherent campaign which promotes directly lifelong learning and life wide learning. Other campaigns promote parts of the lifelong learning: adult education, especially vocational training, foreign languages, ICT etc.

References

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The republished Law of Education no.606/1999.

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Governmental Order no.3062 from 18.01.2000

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All these references was downloaded from the following sites:

<http://www.edu.ro>

<http://www.cedu.ro>

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