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International Support to Adult Education: Is Assistance with Setting up Adult Education in a Foreign Country Possible?²

Abstract: Education takes place everywhere in the world – and everywhere in a different manner. Even with the closest proximity and neighborhood, in the European Union, there are as many education systems as member states, perhaps even a few more, if we bear in mind the great scope of autonomy in Belgium, Spain and Great Britain. One looks over and over again, how the situation is in some other education system, whether it was more successful as one's own and whether we can learn something from it. This applies also to adult education. The structures, institutions and offers are even more linked here with the respective society, its history and its principles than this is the case with schools and universities. In fact by observing a particular adult education one doesn't only learn about it, but also especially something about the society, in which it exists - thereby also something about the adult education in one's own country – and about one's own social reality. This comparison, learning from each other, has been strongly impelled in Europe in the past two decades by the policy of the European Union, which has declared the life-long learning and as a part of it the adult education as a separate matter since the Maastricht Treaty. In many different projects, exchange programs and joint discourses many commonalities were discovered and developed, but the differences have also become clear. It is inevitable to establish also different levels of development in such comparisons. Adult education structures are simply more developed in the Scandinavian countries based on their education tradition of the past two hundred years than those in the south and eastern European countries, even more than in the South-East European countries. Serbia is an exception here, in view of the former existence of a grown and developed adult education, which was however severely affected by the events of the past decades. Different levels of development always rise the question within the solidarity in the European Union, how to make assistance, support available. In many cases this sup-

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port is given bilaterally, between two EU-member states, in many cases also integrated into multilateral projects of the European Union, also financed by it. Programs “Grundtvig” and “Leonardo” show many examples of it. The sensitive and central main question with such a support is always the one of to what extent are the concepts, theories and the structures of the helping hand transferred along with the assistance and thereby also overlapping or even hindering (hampering) the countries’ own and specific developments. It is hard to give an empiric answer to this question, many aspects of it being speculative. However, there are again and again some hints in one or another direction, which can be interpreted. This article addresses the German support to the (re-)development of the adult education in Romania. The project office in charge of it in the Romanian capital Bucharest was closed more than two years ago and the activities have been evaluated in the meantime. Some aspects can be captured.

Key words: adult education, education systems, European Union, training in Romania.

The Social Context

At the time of uprising against the communist dictator who was for many years in power, Nicolae Ceaucescu, Romania was probably the purest and the most backward country in Europe. Ceaucescu has set up and expanded his primarily autonomous (in relation to the other communist states of the Eastern Bloc) and economically independent (from the capitalistic constraints of the West) position at the expense of his country and his nation.³ The “Verdict” against Ceaucescu and his wife, confiscation of all the assets and the death penalty “was based on the counts of indictment for genocide, undermining the state power, acts of diversion and undermining the national economy “ (Kunze, 2000, p. 401). Especially the last count of the indictment was obvious, a disastrous economic “independency policy” has shaped the development of Romania in the eighty years of the past century.

The science and education system didn’t remain unaffected. Especially prominent was the condemnation of the most social-scientific disciplines, especially of the psychology, sociology and pedagogy (not teacher training) at the universities. Only in the middle and the end of the ninety years the respective institutes and faculties were re-established at the universities –thus with a teaching staff who had a gap of two generations. Particularly noticeable in the education system was the ignorance towards the necessary innovations, sticking to a methodology and didactics, which didn’t correspond to the scientific findings for decades anymore. The adult education was – as in the most communistic coun-

³ See also the very short biography on Nicolae Ceaucescu: Kunze, 2000

tries – ideologically controlled and shaped and was based accordingly on a widely spread institutional network, but it wasn't scientifically underpinned anymore.

The change from the Ceaucescu-regime (end of 1989) to a new form of government, a republic, didn't occur only martially, but also along with great problems of developing a democratic state. The secret police "Securitate" remained in its staff structures and still plays a role in the life of the country – even if it's a diminishing one and even if it is not always realistic, it is vivid in the observation and the interpretation of the people. Corruption and missing political stability have led to great fluctuations in the party-political set up, in the political programs and in the everyday politics. And of course it was hard for the economy to resolve itself from the communist traditions – similar to other communist country of the former Eastern Bloc.

The phase of a certain consolidation was followed (1997 until 1999) by an economy crisis of a large scale with great poverty, big unemployment rate a galloping inflation. A temporarily improvement was achieved here as well, based on which the membership at NATO (2004) and the membership in the European Union (2007) became possible. The international economy crisis had however a negative impact, especially in Romania: in March 2009 the country had to take support (by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund) in form of a credit amounting to 20 billions Euro.

The political transformation, transition, the economy crises and the integration process in the European Union had a great impact on the reforms in the education area as well as the institutional, legal and economic framework conditions, which affected the development of the education area and adult education greatly (s. Lattke & Schur, 2010, p. 31). Also the traditional behavior and the mindset shape the society, the education system and its status in the country. They include in particular:

- A widely spread distrust towards the political system, the political parties and the politically active persons. Over and over again the processes show that Romania has followed the principles of "Berlusconismo" long before Berlusconi - primacy of the private and personal interest over a public and social responsibility. This distrust also includes both a latent fear of a still active Securitate and also the constant assumption of an active corruption.
- The widely spread distrust towards any form of cooperation, coming from the experience of the communist age but also from the first period after it was often exploited for the own interests and cancelled out. Pos-

sible and omnipresent rivalry on finances, ideas, influence and reputation can increasingly be found also in the education area.

- The lack of confidence in a guaranteed supply, appropriate prices and similar quality that lead to unpredictable buying patterns, “hoarding”, barter trade and supply networks; even with the staff recruitment – the recommendation of one person from the network is often more important than the proven qualification and competencies.
- Restriction to the necessary, the assignment, the task, to one’s own interest and a wide negation of other related aspects such as ecological behavior or joint responsibility; Romania belongs to the “dirtiest” countries of the European Union, storage of waste in public areas is a common practice.
- Eventually: the learning behavior. The decades of education tradition to teach and learn in the classic head-on situation and only cognitively bear consequences even for the today’s young people regarding their critical faculties, motivation, flexibility and their self-reliance.

When it comes to individuals the economical side has justifiably absolute priority. Difficulty to lead a life in one’s own country with an average monthly income of approx. 500 Euros has driven many young people, but also mothers and fathers, abroad, in order to provide a sufficient income – with a consequence both of emigration of skilled workers and a great problem of “copii abandonati”, abandoned children, especially in the rural areas. Those with better qualification who remain in the country, choose either self-employment (profitable especially in the health area), become either payments in money or payments in kind from their clients or work in two or more jobs – or all together.

Education Sector

The education sector has a structure in Romania that traces back to the regulation of education in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Schools and universities have a respective structure, the area of adult education used to have (beside the Grundtvig-like impulses) elements such as adult education centers and institutions for public lectures (similar to Urania).

Previously stiffened for decades, the education has undergone many “reforms” since the transition. It was and it still is often about revision of legislation that was developed and adopted quickly and contains design deficiencies. Example for it is the introduction of Habilitation at universities: according to it, all the professors, also those already in office should prove a Habilitation (acc.

to the German model), whereas there were no authorities in Romania and no procedures to implement it. Only almost two years after the Law (2010) directives were adopted on how to implement Habilitations - thus with wage cuts at universities.

New laws and by-laws were adopted for schools in time intervals, which make their implementation impossible. "The same has happened in the education sector as in the economy: the old structures should be replaced, the new initiatives are rather incoherent and often only mechanical take-over of the foreign concepts" (Sava & Matache, 2003, p. 11). There are clear differences between the cities and the rural areas, the later having great problems due to small population numbers, lack of qualified teachers, disrepair of school buildings and inadequate public transportation.

In the area of adult education there was scarcely any movement in the nineties of the past century. In the areas where they still exist, the municipal cultural centers have overtaken some activities of adult education. In the area of vocational education institutions were set up in cooperation with foreign countries (foremost Germany, Italy, Denmark), in which the people were trained for specific professions, such as German-Romanian Association (RFG) in Timisoara, the biggest city in the region where formerly many Germans used to live - Banat (*Banatschwaben*). Impulses were also given by the office of the German Association of Adult Education from Bucharest that was taking care of qualifying the staff and rebuilding of adult education structures.

Only the prospective of integration of Romania into the European Union has brought about a certain dynamics in the development of adult education. The „Memorandum on Life Long Learning“ was intensively discussed also in Romania. It has encouraged the activities for the development of adult education, as well as Bologna –process for creating a European university area, introduction of a quality assurance system and the discussions regarding a qualification framework.

Especially the crisis years have lead in Romania to more consciousness in the politics about the function of education. The actionism of repeatedly new reforms and revisions got replaced by more conceptual bases; the program for Human Resources Development in the National Employment Strategy (2007 until 2013) and the "Strategy for Vocational Education and Training" (2005 – 2010) make good examples for it. They focus their attention – as expectable based on the economy situation – on vocational education, on the "employability" of adults in Romania.

Despite the recognizable efforts regarding the adult education in the past almost ten years the country has remained in many "benchmarks" in the bottom

position of the European comparison. The drop-out rate was dramatically high in 2007 with almost 20 %, the participation quote in adult education was 1,3 % (European average: 9,7 %) and the percent of low-qualified in the mastery of basic cultural tools – reading and writing – was 40%, twice as high as the European average (see also the PISA-results).

The main reasons (acc. to Sava, 2008) of the limited development of adult education in Romania are to be found in:

- In the high percentage of the rural inhabitants, almost the half,
- In a high reduction of the institutional infrastructure of adult education,
- In the lack of state support for the general and non-formal education,
- In the low investment of employers in adult education,
- In a weak civil society, still a strong state orientation,
- In a high migration rate – four millions of Romanians work abroad,
- In the South-East Europe mentality that can also be found in Bulgaria and Greece, home orientation
- And in the fact that beside two jobs not much time can be spared for adult education.

Some of these reasons are so deep that one cannot expect short-time successes in case the situation gets better. Especially the weak institutional structure, the lack of qualified staff and the occupational multiple burdens of people can be influenced and developed only in a holistic approach. We can take the example of the teaching staff at universities: due to low wages they are forced to have (at least) one more job beside the university, or to double their teaching load within the university – there is barely time left for research and no finances. The retroactive demand for Habilitations make the specific mismatch between the regulatory policy and the economical reality in Romania clear.

German Support

A coordination office of *dvv international* was opened already in 1993 in Bucharest on behalf of and financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation. It was assigned to support the rebuilding of the Romanian adult education that was decimated after the Revolution of 1989 in its structure and functional transformation. Only short time before (1991), the possibility to establish private education institutions was introduced in the constitution. Shortly after that (1995) adult education was integrated in the education law. At the

same time, “many adult education centers and arts and leisure centers have lost the essential parts of their both material and conceptual foundations” (Lattke & Schur, 2010, p. 32).

The main tasks of the coordination office were from the very beginning, beside the lobbying work, to provide the infrastructure of adult education i.e. to re-establish it and to promote the qualification of the staff. An important step was the setting up of the “National Association of Adult Education Centers” (ANUP), supported by the lobbying work of the office with the respective Ministry of Education and Culture.

The work of the office became upwind by the international happenings, especially thanks to the fifth international conference on adult education (CONFINTEA 5) 1997 in Hamburg, at which the representatives of Romania took place for the first time. The conference and its results have inspired the setting up of a national Council for Vocational Training of Adults (*Consiliul National de Formare Profesionala a Adultilor* – CNFPA), which bundled the forces for the renewal of adult education. The office in Bucharest had a supportive role in this. This National Council has gained more importance afterwards, among other things, also due to the fact that the courses have provided authorized and therefore also a national certification – a broad opportunity used foremost by the private providers. In the meantime the Council has also taken over the task of a national qualification agency, a central task in a country, which traditionally places a great deal of importance on certificates and documents. The council also plays a great role in the development of the vocational training market that is still in an early stage – according to general estimation – with meanwhile 2000 institutions and approx. 6000 programs.

At the turn of the millennium the core of the work of the Office consisted in setting up Adult Education Centers (RZEB) and – since 2003 – in setting up a decentralized network of those previously 19 regional Adult Education Centers (set up as *Asociatia Nationala a Centrelor Zonale de Educare a Adultilor*, ANC-ZEA). Setting up regional centers represents an attempt to consolidate the education work with adults embedding especially the rural areas, to further develop methods and concepts and to include people more in the education work. Based on the model of the German program of the learning regions the adult education institutions became more integrated in the development of regional structures.

In this structural and infrastructural system people have played and still play an important role – as the stakeholders in the adult education. Without their engagement, their competences and their work such a reconstruction would be inconceivable. The office in Bucharest „has made it possible in many ways to include German and international experts in the initial and continuing education

of the AE-professionals. It insisted on the cross-border dialogue and exchange of experience with the stakeholders and institutions of SE, for example with Adult Education Centers in Germany. "New orientational knowledge, respective pedagogic and methodology knowledge, working techniques, new professional and working competences were conveyed" (Lattke & Schur, 2010, p. 39).

Many travelling and cultural obstacles were dismantled. The integration of the rural area has made it possible to organize many encounters in the small villages of Moldova, Carpathians or in the Banat. Whole-day travels under difficult conditions (the Romanian roads are justifiably known for their poor shape) were not rare. The great cultural and social differences, which exist between the Western European education concepts and the former communistic states and rural areas could not always be easily bypassed. The question of financing the courses, their didactic structure (developing learning instead of pure lecturing), applicability and implementation in the practice, competition to other learners were often setting the agenda. The language itself (expert German/learner Romanian) was a smaller obstacle in this context.

The basic understanding problems consisted mainly in view of the market and management based aspects. They were not originating only from the lack of experience, but often also from the resistance of ideological art and suspicion. Suspicion not only towards the concepts, but also towards the intended regional cooperation partners, who were considered as competition on a limited regional market. Conveying of a win-win situation without the respective individual and collective experience was extremely difficult.

Some of the regional centers have managed to still stand their ground. They have grown and increased the adult education in their region. Others fell apart, although their divisions still organize adult education activities. The Bucharest Office was closed in 2010 – since Romania is meanwhile in the European Union. Many ideas and impulses conveyed by the persons such as Klaus Meisel are still highly visible. Even if the adult education has to fear over and over again to be impacted by the effects of the last global economy crisis: over state restrictions, less finances people have, or the loss of perspectives.

Dominancy or Support?

If we ask the question, whether the support by a developed country promotes one's own development or if imposes „foreign“ structures, we will become a differentiated picture. It has to be differently evaluated, depending on whether it about the contents, the structures or the people.

Regarding the contents initially the foreign concepts, theories, experience and the approaches are dominating. This is however based on the need: due to the lack of own development such already existing models are a direct demand and taken as a learning content. It is found that the offered contents are questioned in the courses – less related to their development context, more regarding their usability in the own country; in the course of the learning process “practical test“ is increasingly taking place, which is formulated primarily over questions of understanding. Less suitable concepts and models are also accepted but also quickly set aside.

The structures are a part of the support that bears the greatest danger of being imposed in many ways. The structures are related to institutions, financing, course organizations and accompanying measures such as quality controls and evaluation. Without such structures the foreign help can mostly not be obtained, since it is an integrated part of the respective systems. On the other hand, they are often not suitable to the possibilities and interests there, where they get offered as assistance. Especially the German support (the prejudice is confirmed here) is sometimes featured by a strong emphasis on the structures. Such structures fall however apart as soon as the support terminates and the “own” structural concepts emerge. Although: with transition problems and delays.

The people are eventually those who gain the most out of a foreign support. They have the possibility to learn from the experience of others, to put their own problems and goals into a larger context and to shape up and develop their competences. They have the strongest and the most superior resistance potential against imposing, even if it is connected with financial and career drawbacks. On the Romanian example the sustainable impact of the foreign support is especially vivid in the area of professional development of human resources.

Sustainability is eventually the most difficult term among the relevant ones. It varies between the different periods of the existence and different intensity grades. If we take the German support in Romania for example, we can assume that relevant and effective support was given for years to come.

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Međunarodna podrška obrazovanju odraslih: Da li je moguća pomoć u izgradnji sektora obrazovanja odraslih u nekoj drugoj zemlji?

Apstrakt: Obrazovanje je sveprisutni fenomen, ali je svugde, čak i u zemljama u neposrednom okruženju, veoma raznoliko. U Evropskoj uniji skoro da postoji onoliko obrazovnih sistema koliko i zemalja članica. Možemo uvek iznova posmatrati karakteristike drugih obrazovnih sistema i pokušavati da dođemo do odgovora da li su neki drugi obrazovni sistem uspješniji od "našeg" i da li može nešto iz njih da se nauči. Ovo se odnosi i na obrazovanje odraslih. Strukture, institucije i ponuda su u većoj meri povezane sa matičnim društvom, njegovom istorijom i normama, nego što je to slučaj sa školskim sistemom i univerzitetima. Štaviše, posmatrajući specifičnosti obrazovanja odraslih, pojedinac ne samo da uči o njemu, već se upoznaje i sa specifičnostima društva u kome ono postoji, a time indirektno saznaje i nešto o obrazovanju odraslih u sopstvenoj zemlji i sopstvenoj društvenoj realnosti. Ovo poređenje i međusobno učenje u protekle dve decenije je snažno podsticano u Evropi, shodno politici Evropske unije, koja je celoživotno učenje i obrazovanje odraslih kao deo njega, izdvojila kao posebnu temu, i to još od Mاستrihtskog ugovora. Kroz razne projekte, programe razmene i zajednički pristup otkrivene su i razvijale se mnoge zajedničke odlike, ali su i razlike postale jasne. Neminovno je da se kod ovakvih poređenja konstatuju i različiti nivoi razvoja. Uzmimo za primer skandinavske zemlje, gde su u proteklih gotovo dvesta godina strukture obrazovanja odraslih, zahvaljujući tamošnjoj tradiciji, mnogo razvijenije u odnosu na zemlje južne i istočne Evrope, pa čak i jugoistočne Evrope. Srbija je izuzetak, jer je imala razvijen sistem obrazovanja odraslih, ali su događaji proteklih decenija ostavili veoma negativne posledice na taj sistem. U okviru Evropske unije različiti nivoi razvijenosti uvek povlače pitanje solidarnosti - kako obezbediti podršku i kako tu podršku učiniti što više dostupnom. Često se takva pomoć daje bilateralno, između dve zemlje članice, ali neretko je slučaj da se pomoć integriše u okviru multilateralnih projekata Evropske unije. U okviru programa *Grundvig* i *Leonardo* ima mnogo takvih primera. Osetljivo i centralno pitanje koje se uvek nameće kod takve podrške glasi: „U kojoj meri se uz davanje pomoći prenose i koncepti, teorije i strukture zemlje 'pomagača', čime se u drugi plan stavljaju ili čak sputavaju specifičnosti razvoja

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zemlje?” Teško je empirijski odgovoriti na ovo pitanje, pošto je dosta toga u njemu spekulativno. Ipak, ima dosta primera koji se mogu interpretirati na različite načine. U ovom članku se analizira jedan od takvih primera - nemačka podrška (ponovnoj) izgradnji sistema obrazovanja odraslih u Rumuniji. Nemačka projektna kancelarija koja se time bavila u Bukureštu, glavnom gradu Rumunije, zatvorena je pre nešto više od dve godine. Rezultati su u međuvremenu evaluirani, pa se neki aspekti mogu jasno videti.

Ključne reči: obrazovanje odraslih, obrazovni sistemi, Evropska unija, trening u Rumuniji.

