

THE EDUCATION AND THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING OF ADULTS - VECTORS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

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Abstract. *The education and the vocational training of adults is a learning process which implies the storing of knowledge, skills, abilities or the change of the attitude and behaviours in order to improve the accomplishments of people at the workplace and in everyday life. In a Europe in which the change happens drastically and regularly, the training is necessary for the development of the intellectual capital. A general rule says that the necessary of training follows from the extent of changes. The study intends to present briefly the concepts of education of adults and vocational training of adults, to make an analysis on the participation in the vocational training of adults in Romania, within the period 2004 - 2012, and to bring to attention a series of proposals and recommendations in order to improve carrying on the activity of vocational training of adults in Romania. The data analysed were taken from the national Strategy for the vocational training of adults 2014 - 2020 and refer to: the number of authorized programs, the number of authorized training providers, the number of people that have finished the courses and obtained the qualification certificates and the number of people that have finished the courses and obtained the certificates of completion within the period 2004 - 2012. The analysis emphasizes the heterogeneity of the system of vocational training of adults in Romania and the concentration of approximately 25% of the training activity in the municipal town of Bucharest. The proposals and the recommendations formulated resulted from double perspective: that of specialist on the list of the Commission for authorization of Suceava and that of provider. The activity of specialist focused on three directions: the assessment of the vocational training providers in order to obtain the authorization for carrying on a training program, monitoring the activity of the vocational training providers and the examination of the participants in the training programs in their capacity as member or chairman of the assessment commissions.*

Keywords: *adult education; vocational training of adults; intellectual capital; lifelong learning; vocational training programs.*

Introduction

Education of adults

The theorists of education focused along time, especially, on the mechanisms for the child education within the formal educational system, the major efforts being centred upon the assurance of the

quality of education and training of the child. For a long time it was considered that, once the initial education finished, the young adult didn't need to learn any more or that, becoming an adult, he/she knew how to do it and didn't need support. At the adult age, education is not compulsory any more, at least formally, achieving especially non –formally or informally. These arguments unjustly overshadowed the education of adults. Moreover, if we analyse the big effort made in the field of education sciences, in order to educate the child until 18 or 25 years old and if we calculate that an individual usually lives 70 years, we can see that approximately 50 years in a life fall under the education of adults. If we add to this image that the adult achieves a series of social roles, has a multitude of responsibilities and statuses (parent, employee, unemployed, manager, husband, pensioner, etc), which sometimes can provoke crises in which the adult needs assistance, we can imagine the diversity of the educational needs (refresher courses, specialty, qualification, requalification, spending leisure time, personal development, etc) that the adult, and his/ her education respectively, experiences. As the education needs structured closely related to the social phenomena registered at the level of different states, terms or syntagms appeared that tried to relate to these phenomena (for example: *basic education of adults*, *education of illiterate adults*, *education of unemployed adults*, etc.), manifesting efforts of linguistic consistence, with the majority imposing of the English terms.

In 1974, on the occasion of the edition of the UNESCO Report „Learn to Be”, Edgard Faure approaches the education of adults by reporting to two axes: individual and social. He says that the education of adults represents a substitution of the initial education, especially for those that benefitted partially from it and need a second chance to education, that it prolongs the education of each individual in order to face the increased exigences of the contemporary world and that it polishes the education of those that are situated at a high level of education representing a way of personal development and accomplishment. This definition connects the education of adults with the initial, formal education and integrates it in a larger concept of *lifelong education*.

Within the UNESCO General Conference of Nairobi, in 1976, *the education of adults* stands out synthetically and comprehensively, thus: „the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development” (Records of the General Conference Nineteenth Session, Nairobi, 1976, p.120).

The introduction of the concept of *lifelong education* is considered to be made by Paul Lengrand in 1970, at the UNESCO Conference in Paris, he presents the report „ An Introduction to Lifelong Learning ”. The presentation of this report has as effect the constitution by UNESCO of the International Commission on the Development of Education chaired by Edgar Faure. The UNESCO Conference in Hamburg, in 1997 is considered a key point of action concerning the recongnition of the fact that the education of adults makes a contribution to the development of the autonomy and the sense of responsibility, to the habilitation of adults to cope with the socio-economic changes, to the promotion of the creative participation of citizens in the community life. It is evidenced now, the sustained dynamics of the education of adults as a natural result of the social request and the more coherent and more systematic educational policies.

Vocational training of adults

A new paradigm of learning, which has as a central pillar, acquiring skills, constitutes *lifelong vocational education and training (VET)*. The content and the actual significance of the concept has suffered modifications since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights until today. Within the period 1940- 1960 it was insisted on the eradication of illiteracy in the world, operating with the notion of initial education, acquiring elementary writing, reading and arithmetic knowledge for the

entire population of school age, respectively. Although the expenses were huge, the results were far from those expected. The years 1960- 1970 emphasized on the pre-school and primary education, both attached to the notion of basic education, considered fundamental and mandatory. From this moment it was outlined the idea according to which the learning process must be extended lifelong, education being the one that bases the continuing and permanent learning, beyond the preparation in the formal educational institutions, through vocational training courses, organized by different entities. Thus, it is developed a new concept of *education of adults*, which has two significances: on one hand, the assurance of the education of adults who, for different reasons interrupted their studies within the period of initial training and who, at maturity, have the possibility to continue them, and, on the other hand, the adaptation of the skills and qualification of occupied workforce to the new requirements, especially to those of the technological and organizational progress.

In this context, within the Second World Conference on Adult Education, Montreal, Canada, 1960, it was precised that the education of adults was not an adding or a supplement, but was part of the educational system. On the international plan it is one of the initial moments in the emergence of the concept of *lifelong vocational education and training*. Beginning with the 1970s until now, one can see the major emphasis on the *continuing vocational education and training*. One can see, therefore, the shifting of the emphasis from the quantitative aspects, related to the eradication of illiteracy, to the qualitative ones, related to the extension of the access to education of all people, irrespective of their age. The new concept emerged as a solution to be followed before the evolution of the contemporary society towards a society and an economy based on knowledge. The access to information and knowledge as new as possible, gaining new skills, condition the competitiveness and the capacity of professional insertion, the adaptability of the workforce and, finally, the durable economic and social evolution of the entire society.

The multitude of the action fields in the education of adults couldn't generate clear delimitations, permanently existing overlaps and interferences. If the education field related to the career and vocational training caused analysis, reflection and action, the general education of adults field, denominated free education of adults, was wide and difficult to define. The most important dimension of the education of adults is represented by the *vocational training* because, the dominant component of the social status of these is related to work and the profession or occupation practiced. The labor market, in a continuing evolution and transformation, requests more and more complex vocational skills, which allow the individuals to change the workplace, or promoting in their career.

The definition of the concept of *vocational training of adults* knew different approaches. Adam Fleşeriu (2003, p.19) considers that *the vocational training* represents „a logical and systematic knowledge assembly and practical skills accumulated through vocational training, submitted to the process of extension and permanent renewal by improving the vocational training, necessary knowledge and skills in order to practice a profession , and in the work „The Management of Human Resources”, the authors notice that the vocational training „ means a systematic process of changing the behaviour, the knowledge and the motivation of the existent employees in order to improve the balance between the characteristics of the employee and the requirements of the workplace” (Pânişoară, 2005, p.83).

The national legislation in the field, though it refers to different aspects of the continuing vocational training, doesn't give a definition in the true sense of the word. In the National Education Law, the continuing vocational training is presented as being ”the total of the lifelong learning activities achieved by each person in formal, non formal and informal contexts, in order to train or develop the skills from a multiple perspective: personal, civil, social or occupational” (Law no. 1 / 2011 - National Education Law, Art. 328, Al. 2). This formulation includes in the definition of continuing vocational training (or permanent education, as it is denominated in the text of the law) the initial training, which reflects another problem related to the definition of this concept, the fact that it wasn't reached any consensus on the coverage area of the field neither at the level of Romania, nor at the European level.

Participation in the vocational training of adults in Romania within the period 2004 – 2012

One of the main elements of the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007- 2013 aimed at the development of human resources, through intervention measures like: the development of the counselling and guiding system in order to participate in the vocational and continuing education and training and the achievement of lifelong education with a participation rate in the instruction programs of 12.5% until 2010 (from 1.5% in 2004). The survey achieved in 2011 on a national sample, by the Observer for the Development of Permanent Learning concerning the participation of employees in the continuing vocational training, reflects that Romania hasn't made any significant progress regarding the participation of adults with ages between 25- 64 in lifelong learning, the value of the indicator registering a slight increase, from 1.3% in 2007, to 1.6% in 2011. Romania and Bulgaria (1.2 %) occupy the last places among the EU states at this indicator.

Under these conditions, Romania is far from the European objective for 2020 projected at a weight of 15%. Also, the survey identifies the most important barriers in the way of the participation in the continuing training: limited financial stimulants for the individual, and also for the employer, limited information of the population regarding the training offers, lack of flexibility of the existent training offers, limited access to the system of recognition and validation of learning obtained in informal and non formal contexts. In the context, the analysis of statistical data (Table 1) presented within the National Strategy for the Vocational Training of Adults 2014- 2020 (draft, July 2, 2013), emphasizes the heterogeneity of the vocational training system of adults in Romania.

Table 1. Participation in the vocational training of adults in Romania, within the period 2004 – 2012 (The National Authority for Qualifications)

County code	County	Number of authorized programs within the period 2004-2012	Number of authorized vocational training providers within the period 2004-2012	Number of graduates who obtained the qualification certificates within the period 2004-2012	Number of graduates who obtained the certificates of completion within the period 2004-2012
01	Alba	615	114	34086	18232
02	Arad	342	82	18822	17803
03	Argeş	613	110	37111	38091
04	Bacău	862	135	38662	61913
05	Bihor	394	123	22761	16339
06	Bistriţa Năsăud	110	31	9248	4414
07	Botoşani	212	54	13227	24921
08	Braşov	931	135	57145	48495
09	Brăila	418	80	15808	18923
10	Buzău	391	74	27649	16381
11	Caraş Severin	296	57	28207	10646
51	Călăraşi	354	57	28094	5784
12	Cluj	1205	231	66096	45528
13	Constanţa	907	176	55907	58171
14	Covasna	185	50	15228	6814
15	Dâmboviţa	465	86	42759	16355
16	Dolj	710	180	39103	40062
17	Galaţi	719	107	50455	27861
52	Giurgiu	93	34	4683	2951

County code	County	Number of authorized programs within the period 2004-2012	Number of authorized vocational training providers within the period 2004-2012	Number of graduates who obtained the qualification certificates within the period 2004-2012	Number of graduates who obtained the certificates of completion within the period 2004-2012
18	Gorj	314	89	17969	12225
19	Harghita	328	87	17617	11170
20	Hunedoara	719	123	43030	28062
21	Ialomița	142	38	9185	4638
22	Iași	1020	183	48053	64207
23	Ilfov	198	73	8539	8434
24	Maramureș	630	105	25205	19967
25	Mehedinți	216	56	17417	9952
26	Mureș	452	131	29065	22478
27	Neamț	480	101	26738	21584
28	Olt	258	58	12171	15183
29	Prahova	677	127	48634	42230
30	Satu Mare	215	67	13558	11208
31	Sălaj	280	52	20548	9005
32	Sibiu	632	147	26778	31183
33	Suceava	230	73	12606	9030
34	Teleorman	179	48	18562	16040
35	Timiș	992	201	54161	53798
36	Tulcea	241	62	15072	8143
37	Vaslui	150	44	13530	8187
38	Vâlcea	807	152	55265	34708
39	Vrancea	242	42	13251	8619
	TOTAL 2004-2012 except Bucharest	19224	3975	1152005	929735
40	Municipal town of Bucharest	6338	1248	220605	354338
	TOTAL 2004-2012	25562	5223	1372610	1284073

One can find in Table 1 that within the period 2004 - 2012, at the country level (except Bucharest) a number of 19,224 training programs were authorized and the number of training providers is 3,975. In some counties more than 1000 programs were authorized (Cluj, Iași), and in others (Giurgiu, Bistrița Năsăud) the number of authorized programs was extremely small (less than 200).

Concerning the number of graduates of the training programs, within the period 2004- 2012 obtained qualification certificates a number of 1,152,005 people, and 929,735 people obtained certificates of completion. (Figure 1). Taking into consideration that the minimum number of hours provided for the qualification programs is 360 (level 1), unlike the initiation, improvement, specialization courses, whose number of hours is not regulated, one can find the increased interest of the participants in obtaining a qualification, even if it implies a relatively big time budget and, sometimes, a significant expense of the participants.



Figure 1. Number of people that finished the courses within the period 2004-2012 (Graph made by the author according to data from Table 1)

In Figure 2, one can find the distribution of programs at the level of the whole country: between 0 and 200 programs - 7 counties, between 201 and 400 programs - 15 counties, between 401 and 600 programs - 4 counties, between 601 and 800 programs - 8 counties and between 801 and 1,000 programs- 5 counties and more than 1,000 programs- 2 counties.

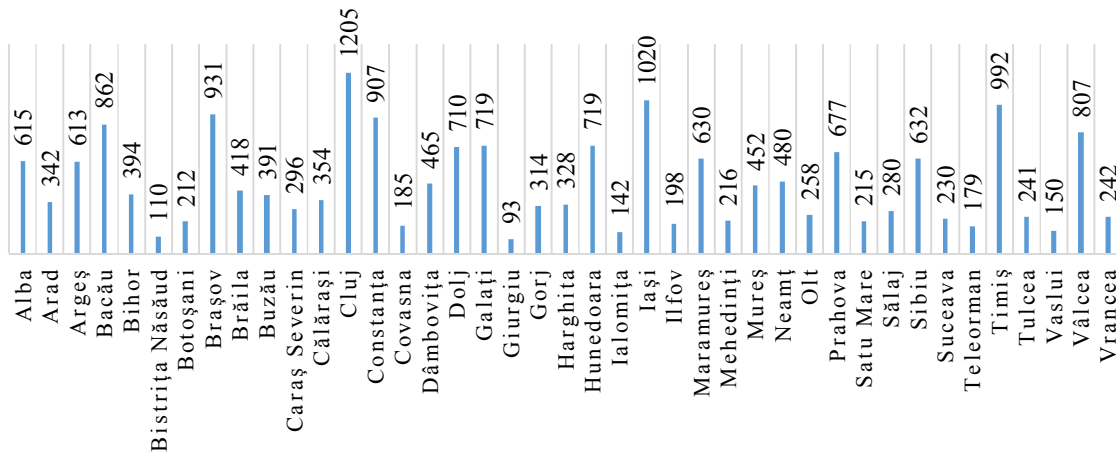


Figure 2. Number of authorized programs within the period 2004- 2012 (Graph made by the author according to data in Table 1)

Concerning the number of authorized vocational training providers within the analysed period, one can find that in the counties: Cluj (231 providers), Timiș (201 providers) and Iași (183 providers) there is an intense activity in the field of the vocational training of adults and in the counties: Bistrița Năsăud (31 providers), Giurgiu (34 providers) and Ialomița (38 providers), this activity is not enough developed. (Figure 3).

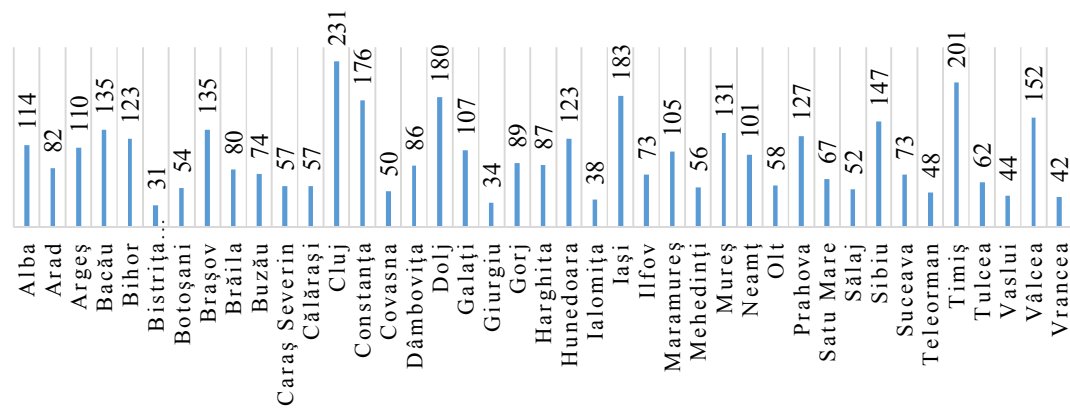


Figure 3. Number of authorized vocational training providers within the period 2004- 2012 (Graph made by the author according to data in Table I)

Analysing the situation of the number of people that finished the courses and obtained the qualification certificates one can find that the biggest number of participants is registered in the counties: Cluj (66,096), Braşov (57,145), Vâlcea (55,265) and Iaşi (48,053), and the most reduced participation is registered in the counties: Giurgiu (4,683), Ilfov (8,539), Ialomiţa (9,185) and Bistriţa Năsăud (9,248) (Figure 4).

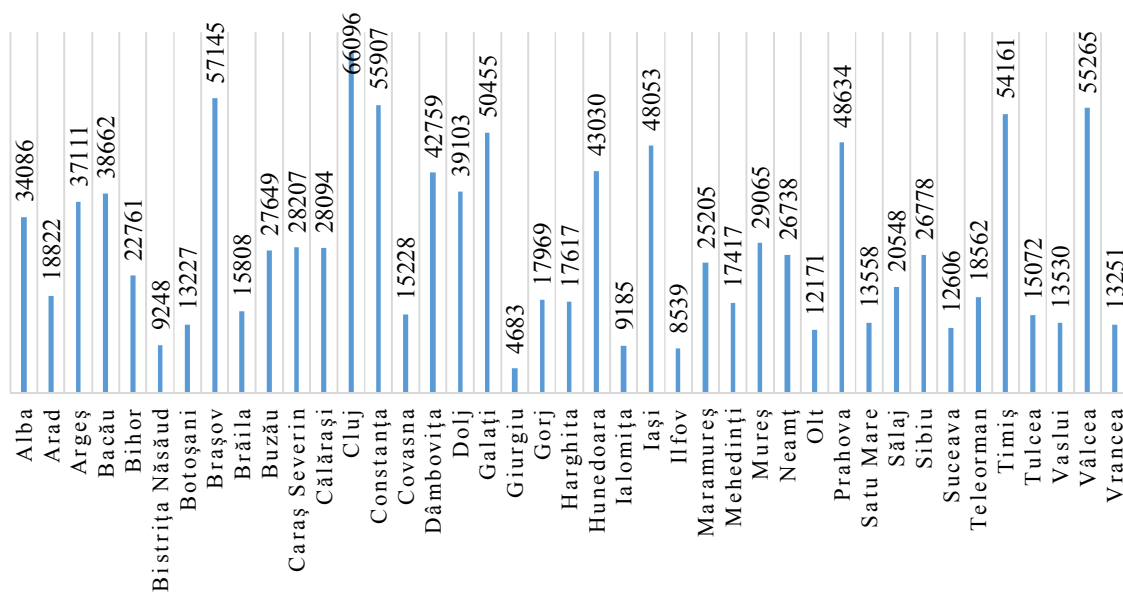


Figure 4. Number of graduates who obtained qualification certificates within the period 2004-2012 (Graph made by the author according to data in Table I)

The interest manifested for the initiation, specialization and improvement courses is presented in Figure 5 and reflects that within the period 2004-2012 most people that finished the courses with the certificates of completion are registered in the counties: Iaşi (64,207), Bacău (61,913), Constanţa (58,171).

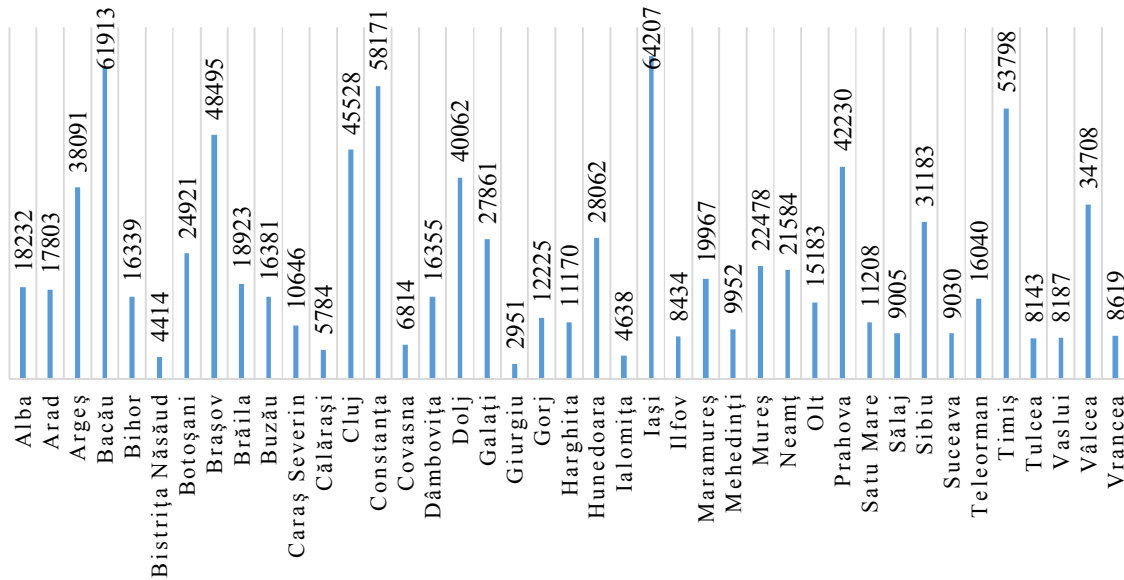


Figure 5. Number of graduates who obtained certificates of completion within the period 2004-2012 (Graph made by the author according to data in Table 1)

The statistical data regarding the municipal town of Bucharest and represented in Figure 6, show that at the level of the capital of Romania the activity of the vocational training of adults is very well developed. One can find that a number of 1,248 training providers were authorized which carried out 6,338 programs and as a result 220,605 people obtained qualification certificates and a number of 354,338 people obtained certificates of completion.

The results demonstrate that the municipal town of Bucharest centers the training activity, due to the big number of providers and the large range of courses which are offered on the market.

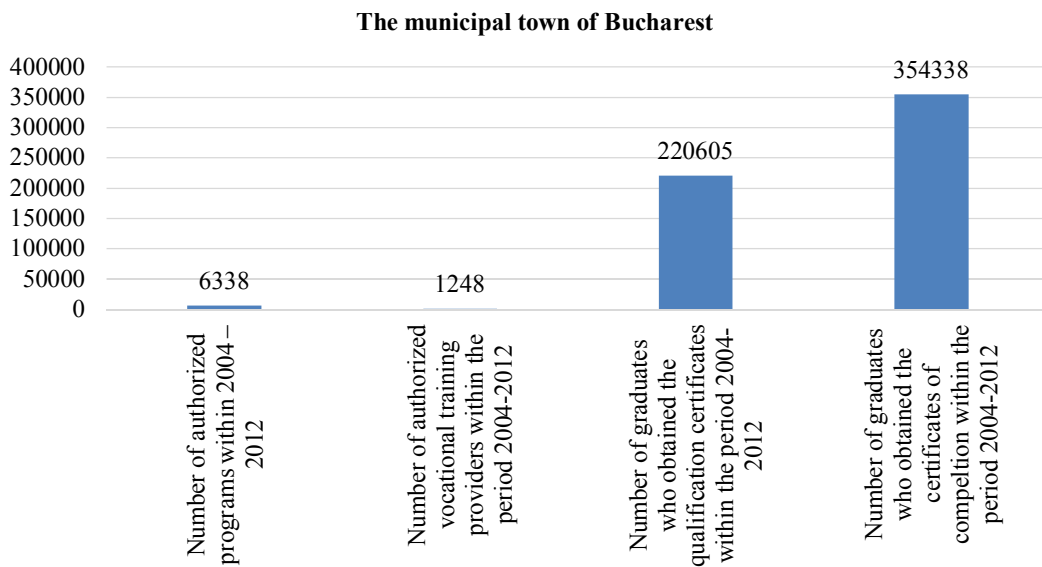


Figure 6. Statistical data of the vocational training in the municipal town of Bucharest within the period 2004-2012 (Graph made by the author according to data in Table 1)

Taking into account the assumed objective through the National Strategy for Durable Development of Romania Horizons 2013- 2020- 2030 which intends that „ compared with the participants in the

vocational qualification and retraining programs of 187,000 people in 2004, at the level of the year 2015, the number reaches a minimum of 360,000”, the vocational training of adults gains an overwhelming importance. A better articulation of the legislation in the field and a right and consistent application of it are necessary, so that, the people that finish the authorized vocational training courses at the national level gain the necessary skills in order to be inserted on the labor market in Romania and Europe.

Proposals and recommendations in order to improve carrying on the activity of vocational training of adults in Romania

According to the regulations in force, the County Commissions for Authorization carry on their activity with the help of specialists. Their activity focuses on three directions: assessment of the training provider in order to obtain the authorization for carrying on a training program, monitoring the activity of the vocational training provider and examining the participants in the training programs in their capacity as member or chairman of the board of examiners. The gained experience in my capacity as specialist on the list of the Commission for authorization of Suceava offered me the possibility to analyse the phenomenon of vocational training of adults from inside and from different perspectives, and to formulate the proposals and the recommendations presented as follows:

- At present the National Authority for Qualifications is not „an authority” in the true sense of the word. In our opinion, the National Authority for Qualifications should have all the competences in the field of the vocational training of adults, and the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and Elderly and so much the less the Ministry of National Education not be involved directly in this process. The coordination of the authority should be under the direct responsibility of the Romanian Government.
- The National Authority for Qualifications should have permanent structures in each county, at present the role of these structures being fulfilled by the employees of the County Agencies for Payments and Social Inspection. For these institutions whose main competences are situated in the field of social services and that have a reduced number of personnel, the vocational training of adults represents „an extra duty”, in some cases not be given the proper importance.
- The existent occupational standards must be periodically revised and adapted, because the social-economic realities suffer substantial transformations, in short periods of time. This is a consequence of the fact that instead of tracing only the general coordinates, these documents are too much detailed.
- The instructions elaborated by the National Authority for Qualifications are too detailed, thick, and lead to the bureaucratization of the training process, to formalism. A re- assessment of the procedures and instructions is necessary, in order to become simpler, more flexible and more easily applicable.
- The county commissions for authorization are not very involved in the training process, although the law confers them multiple responsibilities. In practice, the entire activity is managed by the technical secretariates, sometimes made up of one person. We recommend the revision of the functional regulations of the County commissions for authorization, so that it functions as a system, including concerning the payment of the members of the commission, which is a ridiculous one and which can never motivate the members of the commission, in order to really involve themselves in the process of the vocational training of adults.
- Although the legal provisions precise the obligatory character of the economic agents to use qualified personnel, these do not manifest much interest because: the work under the table is still used, after acquiring a qualification, some employees leave the employer or the organizations do not consider necessary to „waste” the financial resources in order to train the employees.
- The existent providers on the market of the vocational training of adults are, usually, small trading companies or NGOs, with headquarters in apartments and at most one employee, which identified a source of income by carrying out training programs. There are no big economic agents in the field, as there are in the European countries where there is a pride and a guarantee of quality to have a qualification certificate issued by a big company. Our opinion is that there must be a hierarchical placing of the training providers which is supported on sound criteria and results obtained by them.

- The specialists that collaborate with the county Commissions for authorization and that have extremely important competences, even determinant, in the vocational training of adults, achieving the assessment of the providers in order to authorize them, the certification (examining the providables) and monitoring the activity of the training provider, do not have specific knowledge for the vocational training even if in their fields they are good professionals. The practical experience in the field allows us to consider of maximum necessity the elaboration of a procedure of selection of the specialists registered on the list of the Commissions for authorization which assures the creation, maintaining and development of a permanent body of assessment experts, with a high level of competence. We also recommend the organization of training seminars at the level of each commission for authorization, where the specialists participate in order to gain all the legal competences related to the specific field of vocational training. In the same context, one must mention that the specialists are not financially motivated for the activities that they carry on.
- The present system of vocational training of adults exaggerately emphasizes the procedure and the conditions that must be met for the authorization and not the quality of the proper training process and the certification of the acquired knowledge. A successfully used method in some European countries (for example Hungary), where there are regional certification centres, could be adopted. The students are trained by the providers, but the final examination takes place in these centres. This procedure would guarantee the objectivity of the assessment, the standardization, in a positive sense, of the acquired skills. We can discuss that the actual regulations provide that the payment of the boards of examiners devolves on the training providers. This is why, many times, the assessment experts are subjective in the process of assessment of the participants. We recommend that the payment of the examiners specialists passes to the Commissions for authorization and the amount relative to the carried on activities leads to the objectivity of the assesment process.
- In the steps taken in order to encourage at any cost the vocational training of adults (only to report some figures in the official documents), in the legislation in the field weren't provided sanctions until 2014. The situation changed in a way through Law no. 167/2013 for the amendment and completion of the Government Ordinance no 129/2000 on the vocational training of adults, republished in February 2014. At article 54 are described the situations which constitute contraventions and the amount of fines, but there are no specifications about the qualified persons to state the contraventions, to inflict the fines, to register the contraventional situations, etc. We consider necessary a responsible approach of this activity, describing the way of selection of the persons appointed in these commissions, stating the competences of the persons appointed and presenting the control procedure.
- Last but not least, we call the attention on the total lack of the instruments of assurance of quality in the vocational training of adults. Though the recent legal documents refer to the obligatory character of the implementation of the quality management, especially in the organizational culture of the training providers, in practice no step was taken.

Conclusions

In the European area, the vocational training of adults is considered an engine of the development of the society based on knowledge and innovation, reason for which it is given increased attention by the decision factors, making the object of many strategic documents, policies, development priorities. The convergence policy of the European Union and its major objectives (assurance of sustainable development and social cohesion) are far from being achieved in the field of training, the difference between the participation rates of the member states remaining big. The low participation in the vocational training programs of adults influences in a negative way the quality of the intellectual capital, which, in its turn, influences the productivity of the organizations, which influences the economies and their competitiveness. There are policies, strategies, objectives and actions, but their practical application seems extremely difficult to achieve, that may rather reflect a breaking off between the superstate level and local level, than a profitable coherence.

The statistical data regarding the development of human resources concerning education and training show that, from 2009, the European Union totalized approximately 76 million adults that haven't reached the level of upper secondary education- the level considered to be a minimum requirement

not only after successfully entering the labor market, but also for a continuing professional insertion. This group includes approximately 23 million adults that haven't finished any formal education beyond the primary education level. In Romania, the vocational training of adults has begun to develop from 1990, but the participation in this process continues to have very low rates, our country taking, in 2012, the 27th place from 28 in the European Union. The explanation of this phenomenon may be found in the fact that people see the vocational training as a cost, not as an investment in their own development. The economic crisis in the last years is another factor of negative influence, because it determined both people and organizations to reduce their budgets allotted for training. This didn't happen only in Romania, but also in the majority of the European Union states, and the proof is that in 2012, the participation rate in the continuing vocational training was by 0.2 points lower than the rate in 2010.

The lifelong acquirement of knowledge and skills represents a fundamental condition for the individual and professional development, for the increase of the capacity of occupation and adaptation, and the necessity of modernizing the vocational education and training systems in order to eliminate the barriers between different learning contexts and the increase of the access to and participation in learning constitute the fundamental premises for the contemporary society. To conclude, it is important that, although the certificates and diplomas regarding different qualifications are often valid during the professional life of a person, the knowledge, the aptitudes and the necessary skills on the labor market and in the society as a whole evolve rapidly. Consequently, the formal certifications and qualifications, once obtained, are often not sufficient to assure the lifelong and continuing professional insertion. In other words, finishing a formal qualification must be seen today as rather a step on the stairs of permanent education than a purpose in itself.

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