INNOVATIVE COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN MUREŞ COUNTY

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Abstract: The present paper was structured according to information from specialised literature, innovative cooperation in education and training in Mureş County. We conducted a joint protocol of collaboration between the "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureş and the County School Inspectorate - in collaboration with the Teacher Training House Mureş. We emphasise especially on "Strengthening partnerships for sustainable development". We obbey the following principles: cooperation in education and training is implemented in a lifelong learning perspective making effective use of the open method of coordination (OMC) and developing synergies between the different education and training sectors; cooperation in education and training is pertinent and concrete; in order to support efforts to modernise global education and develop a Global Education Area, close synergy with the Bologna process is aimed for, in particular with regard to quality assurance, recognition, mobility and transparency instruments; cross-sectorial cooperation is sought between EU initiatives in education and training and those in related policy areas – particularly employment, enterprise, social policy, youth policy and culture. With specific regard to the knowledge triangle, special attention is paid to the synergies between education, research and innovation, as well as to complementarily with the aims of the European Research Area.

Keywords: cooperation, education, training, Innovation, Mureş County.

Context

We aimed to identify new strands useful for the education network in Mureş County. We used the experience gained in the project "The clubs network for promoting adaptability and sustainable development" – ReCADD Project, financed by the ESF - SOPHRD 39/3.2/G/37787 [6]. We conducted a joint protocol of collaboration between the "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureş and the County School Inspectorate - in collaboration with the Teacher Training House Mureş. We emphasise especially upon "Strengthening partnerships for sustainable development". Central Region Development Strategy for 2014-2020 is based on a detailed diagnosis, reflected in regional socio-economic analysis and SWOT analysis of the Centre Region [4].

Introduction

Education and training play a key role for Europe's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Europe 2020. To unlock the full potential of education as a driver for growth and jobs, Member States must pursue reforms to boost both the performance and efficiency of their education systems. The Education and Training Monitor is a new analytical tool that provides the empirical evidence to underpin this reform agenda. It is a succinct yet comprehensive overview of the core indicators on education and training systems in Europe,

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enabling the reader to compare and contrast recent progress as well as identify the immediate challenges.

Key findings of the Education and Training Monitor 2012 [2] are:

1. *Education is part of the solution to tackle the impact of the crisis, but only if investment is efficient***.** The returns on investment in education and training are undeniable, both monetary and non-monetary, for the individual as well as for society at large. Further demographic changes and budgetary constraints are likely to increase the need to improve efficiency of education expenditures.

2. *Efforts to combat early school leaving must be increased as a matter of urgency.* The prospects for early school leavers are getting worse, with their unemployment at an alarming rate and forecasted to increase. The problem is further aggravated by disparities according to gender and country of birth.

3. *Action to widen participation in tertiary education now needs to be more targeted.* In the last years there has been significant progress in the share of 30-34 years old who have successfully qualified from higher education.

4. *Improving early childhood education and care must continue to be a priority.* The increasing level of participation in early childhood education and care is encouraging. But to provide a solid start for individuals and to be a potential equaliser for European societies, the provision must be of sufficient quality. Quality indicators, such as the child/staff ratio and total expenditure, show strong discrepancies and only slight improvements over the last few years.

5. *Inequalities in achievement of basic skills must be tackled.* A worrying number of 15-year-olds fail to reach basic ability levels in reading, maths and science. In addition, the average masks serious gender inequalities.

6. *Providing relevant skills: a new EU benchmark for language competences.* Foreign language provision is still far off the EU objective of learning 'mother tongue plus two' from a very early age, despite progress in primary, lower secondary and vocational education. In addition, first evidence of young people's language competences highlights low levels indicating that language teaching must become more effective.

7. *Embedding ICT and open educational resources (OER) in teaching and learning can combat the digital divide.* The percentage of the adult population with some computer skills has significantly increased over the last years, but there remain gaps according to age and educational attainment. Action to increase ICT skill levels is needed, and education and training systems can contribute to this by embedding ICT and OER (open educational resources).

8. *Entrepreneurship education should be prioritised.* Most Member States have strategies or on-going initiatives addressing the implementation of entrepreneurship education into general education at primary and/or secondary level, yet only in a quarter of member EU states did a majority of adults believe they had the right skills and knowledge to start a business. Consequently, entrepreneurship needs to be introduced early, and included at all levels and in all disciplines of education and training.

9. *A recent trend is that the learning mobility of young people is increasing across Europe.* It is more developed in tertiary level education. Evidence suggests that mobility levels in initial VET are significantly lower.

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10. *Participation in adult learning is stagnating and must be urgently addressed.* Adult lifelong learning is still far from reality. Participation in learning activities is stagnating, with considerable variation between countries. New developments, such as open educational resources, could help to unlock the potential of informal learning amongst the adult population, allowing for self-guided and occasional learning from a variety of sources.

11. *Significant effort is required to reach the employability benchmark by 2020.* The employment rate of those with tertiary attainment is more than ten percentage points higher than those with only secondary education, while in the current crisis the population with lower attainment is most at risk of unemployment. However, the employment rate of young graduates has fallen since 2008 and strong efforts and additional measures are needed to reach the employability target set for 2020.

Methodology of the Research

We know that:

- in the context of the Lisbon Strategy [3] – a solid framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, based on common objectives and aimed primarily at supporting the improvement of national education and training systems through the development of complementary EU-level tools, mutual learning and the exchange of good practice via the open method of coordination, have led to significant progress being made – notably in support of national reforms of lifelong learning, the modernisation of higher education and the development of common European instruments promoting quality, transparency and mobility – but that substantial challenges still remain;
- Education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges facing Europe and its citizens today and in the years ahead.
- Efficient investment in human capital through education and training systems is an essential component of Europe's strategy to deliver the high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs that lie at the heart of the Lisbon strategy, at the same time as promoting personal fulfilment, social cohesion and active citizenship [5].
- In anticipation of future developments, efforts should therefore be maintained to ensure that education and training remain firmly anchored in the broader strategy. It is also essential that the framework for cooperation should remain flexible enough to respond to both current and future challenges, including those arising under any new strategy.

And also we know that:

1. In the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation is to support the further development of education and training systems which are aimed at ensuring:

a. the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens;

b. sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.

2. Such aims are viewed in a worldwide perspective.

3. European cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2020 is established in the context of a strategic framework spanning education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective. Lifelong learning is regarded as a fundamental

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principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts – whether formal, non-formal or informal – and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning. The framework address the following four strategic objectives: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

4. The periodic monitoring of progress towards a set objective provides an essential contribution towards evidence-based policy making [1].

Contributions

In our protocol of collaboration between the "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureş and the County School Inspectorate - in collaboration with the Teacher Training House Mureş we have integrated the "spirit" of the four objectives, namely:

- *Strategic objective 1:* Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality. The challenges posed by demographic change and the regular need to update and develop skills in line with changing economic and social circumstances call for a lifelong approach to learning and for education and training systems which are more responsive to change and more open to the wider world. New initiatives in the field of lifelong learning may be developed to reflect future challenges. In particular, work is needed to ensure the development of national qualifications frameworks based on relevant learning outcomes and their link to the European Qualifications Framework, the establishment of more flexible learning pathways – including better transitions between the various education and training sectors, greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning, and increased transparency and recognition of learning outcomes. Further efforts are also required to promote adult learning, to increase the quality of guidance systems, and to make learning more attractive in general – including through the development of new forms of learning and the use of new teaching and learning technologies. As an essential element of lifelong learning and an important means of enhancing people's employability and adaptability, mobility for learners, teachers and teacher trainers should be gradually expanded with a view to making periods of learning abroad – both within Europe and the wider world.
- *Strategic objective 2:* Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training High quality education and training systems which are both efficient and equitable are crucial for enhancing employability. The major challenge is to ensure the acquisition of key competences by everyone, developing the excellence and attractiveness at all levels of education and training. To achieve this on a sustainable basis, greater attention needs to be paid to raising the level of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, making mathematics, science and technology more attractive and to strengthening linguistic competences. At the same time, there is a need to ensure high quality teaching, to provide adequate initial teacher education, continuous professional development for teachers and trainers, and to make teaching an attractive career-choice. It is also important to improve the governance and leadership of education and training institutions, and to develop effective quality assurance systems. High quality will only be achieved through the efficient and sustainable use of

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resources – both public and private, as appropriate – and through the promotion of evidence-based policy and practice in education and training.

- *Strategic objective 3: Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship*

Education and training policy should enable all citizens, irrespective of their personal, social or economic circumstances, to acquire, update and develop over a lifetime both job-specific skills and the key competences needed for their employability and to foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue. Educational disadvantage should be addressed by providing high quality early childhood education and targeted support, and by promoting inclusive education. Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants – complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second-chance education and the provision of more personalised learning. Education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights and the environment, as well as combat all forms of discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.

- *Strategic objective 4: Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training* As well as engendering personal fulfillment, creativity constitutes a prime source of innovation, which in turn is acknowledged as one of the key drivers of sustainable economic development. Creativity and innovation are crucial to enterprise development and to Europe's ability to compete internationally. A first challenge is to promote the acquisition by all citizens of transversal key competences such as digital competence, learning to learn, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness. A second challenge is to ensure a fully functioning knowledge triangle of education-research-innovation. Partnership between the world of enterprise and different levels and sectors of education, training and research can help to ensure a better focus on the skills and competences required in the labour market and on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in all forms of learning. Broader learning communities, involving representatives of civil society and other stakeholders, should be promoted with a view to creating a climate conducive to creativity and better reconciling professional and social needs, as well as individual well-being,

Results

In our protocol of collaboration between the "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureş and the County School Inspectorate – in collaboration with the Teacher Training House Mureş we respect the following principles:

a. Cooperation in education and training is implemented in a lifelong learning perspective making effective use of the open method of coordination (OMC) and developing synergies between the different education and training sectors.

b. Cooperation in education and training is pertinent and concrete. It should produce clear and visible outcomes which should be presented, reviewed and disseminated on a regular basis and in a structured manner, thereby establishing a basis for continuous evaluation and development.

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c. In order to support efforts to modernise global education and develop a Global Education Area, close synergy with the Bologna process is aimed for, in particular with regard to quality assurance, recognition, mobility and transparency instruments.

d. Cross-sectorial cooperation is sought between EU initiatives in education and training and those in related policy areas – particularly employment, enterprise, social policy, youth policy and culture. With specific regard to the knowledge triangle, special attention is paid to the synergies between education, research and innovation, as well as to complementarily with the aims of the European Research Area.

e. Well-functioning cooperation using new, transparent ways of networking is needed not only between the relevant institutions, but also with all relevant stakeholders, who have a considerable contribution to make in terms of local policy development, implementation and evaluation.

We believe that the success of the open method of coordination in education and training depends on the commitment of members and on effective working methods. From this perspective, and with a view to greater flexibility, the working methods used in the context of local cooperation is based on the following:

- priority areas: a number of priority areas for cooperation based on the strategic objectives;
- mutual learning: cooperation is carried out by such means as peer learning activities, conferences and seminars, for expert groups, panels, studies and analyses and web-based cooperation and, where appropriate, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders;
- dissemination of results: to enhance visibility and impact.
- monitoring of the process.

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