

PROMOTING ADULT EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Starting from a rather difficult situation of adult education in Romania in early 90's – the collapse of cultural houses and popular universities, little and hardly trained staff, low salaries etc.– insufficient promoted to adults and with a few perspectives for the future, the German experts together with the Romanian and partly British colleagues developed a functional system of adult training in the organizations of the cultural sector. The project was completed between 1992 and 2008, but has continued to be sustainable until now. The paper responds to issues related to the specific way of designing the training plan, the teaching-learning-assessment methods used etc., as well as the feedback obtained from the participants that contributed to the improvement of the project's activities. In this way, the project represented an example of good practice whereby adult education can gain an important place in the cultural education. Along with other components of the educational infrastructure (e.g. schools, community centers for lifelong learning, etc.), libraries and cultural centers play an important role in disseminating education and culture to the rural population. Moreover, given this important role these cultural institutions were linked in regional and national networks, and the Project was easier to be implemented using this educational and cultural infrastructure. The main conclusion is that, from the beginning, focusing on training for permanent staff in a range of different fields – organisational, personnel, financial management, needs analysis, marketing, training for teachers etc. – the project was very successful from the point of view of its stakeholders and may serve as an example for similar situation. Also, one of the main results of the DVV International described project is that it formed the basis on which the future projects of the meantime established organizations, APUR and APUR-International, continued to build on.

Key words: Adult education, functional system, strategy, testimonies, staff training, training methodology.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper it will be analysed the project of DVV International in Romania (German Adult Education Association), compared with the same type of project in other countries, from three different points of view, namely [1]:

- German organisation with its expertise in adult education;
- Romanian partner organisation with comprehensive knowledge of Romanian extracurricular cultural and educational institutions;
- learners (e.g. The Learner's Voice), the most important indicator of whether the work was successful.

As a leading professional organisation in the field of adult education and development cooperation, DVV International has been committed to lifelong learning for about 50 years. It supports the establishment and expansion of sustainable youth and adult education structures worldwide. With the eastward expansion of the EU, Eastern Europe became the focus of attention,

especially with those countries that were striving to join the EU. Romania was one of these countries.

The main objectives of the project were to modernise the existing adult education structures and to ensure access to adult education and improved quality of services.

The focus was on the training and further education of employees in cultural institutions and adult education centres (further information below) as well as of teachers. Equally, the management in adult education and related fields of work as well as on capacity building were the main goals of the strategy. Good and stable structures only guarantee good output if staff and teachers are aware of their organisational and content-related tasks. The best structures are pointless if people are inadequately prepared.

2. TRAINING TOPICS

The main part of the project was to organised training seminars for full-time employees and further training for teachers as thorough training has a great impact on the entire adult education sector (Table 1). In total, there were successfully conducted 372 training and further education seminars during the project period which ended in 2008, after 16 years of operation [6].

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Table 1

Examples of training seminars

Training of trainers	Internal organization of popular universities
Training of teachers (different subjects)	Mass media, marketing
Teaching foreign languages	Role of cultural houses
Intercultural communication / culture and civilization	The image of cultural institutions
Civic education / Life in democracy	Management in market economy
IT	Cultural management
Vocational training	Quality management
New methods and techniques in young people and adult education	Project management
Museum and arts education	Management of change
Learning how to learn	Management of institutions
Ecological education and agrotourism	Environment
Neurolinguistic pedagogy	Future workshop

Table 2

Overview of the number of seminars

Period	No. of seminars	Period	No. of seminars
1993–1994	20	2001	17
1995	14	2002–2003	29
1996	40	2004	28
1997	28	2005	32
1998	26	2006	31
1999	40	2007	27
2000	24	2008	16

Given the big number of seminars carried out the Project's organizers had often to reject interested parties because the maximum number of participants had been reached (Table 2).

Two major PHARE projects focused on further training of full-time employees in exchange with colleagues working in adult education centres in Germany and the UK. Adult educators from the UK and Germany each spent one week in Romania at the workplace of a Romanian colleague, who then spent a week with German or UK colleague. This experience was extremely fruitful for both sides: Romanians could familiarise themselves on site with other methods, fields of work, technologies, etc. and check what they could take over for their own work. English and Germans could see on site what were the strengths and weaknesses of the Romanian adult education system, especially from the training needs point of view, which enable them to work knowingly with the Romanian counterparts on concrete solutions. One of the cooperation outcomes was the founding of IREA, the Institute for Adult Education (in Romanian – *Institutul Român de Educație a Adulților*), supported by the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE).

The training's objective was to make them familiar with new methods and techniques in adult education. Therefore, the participants were offered a wide range of methods, techniques and topics so that they could decide themselves which methods and which topics were meaningful and practicable for their institution (see par.

4). Trainers were adult educators from the UK and Germany with many years of practical and theoretical work experience. This ensured that the training courses provided practical knowledge and skills [2, 3]. Most seminars were aimed at full-time employees in order to give them all the means to professionally manage their institution, recruit adequate staff, select and, if necessary, train suitable teachers.

Parallel to the seminars, a system of adult education was established. The cultural houses and adult education centres run by colleagues who had taken part in the training gradually stabilised and became educational centres again in their localities. With the project's support it was developed a new educational structure, namely the Regional Adult Education Centre – RAEC (in Romanian – *Centrul Zonal pentru Educatia Adulților*). An RAEC is a cultural house or a popular university, which becomes a model for the adult education institution, with a clear structure, for example, with a program that offers a wide spectrum of content for interested persons and whose teaching staff is trained didactically and methodically. The first RAEC, which opened in the late 90's, was soon followed by further centres up to almost 20 today, each of them focusing on one specific topic. This made it possible to exchange interesting themes within the RAEC group and thus support each other throughout the country.

On the same topic it should be mentioned another Romanian project financed by Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which started in 2005 that is still extremely successful. Its name is the Citizens First (in Romanian – *Cetățeanul în primul rând*) dealing with the citizens' education for active involvement in community life [3].

3. METHODOLOGY IN TRAINING THE STAFF AND THE TEACHING PERSONNEL WITHIN THE APUR¹ AND APUR-INTERNATIONAL²

In 1995, the Association of the Popular Universities of Romania (APUR) issued a book [5] in which it was presented widely the training methods used in the national training of the trainers' program. Two great attitudes coexist in the book: the theoretical and strongly pragmatic attitude. This includes a theory of adult education and a guide to concrete action. It describes the specific "pedagogical dramaturgy", from "case method" to "moderation method" and from "mental training" to "brainstorming with ten variants", the book being an encouragement to communication and collaboration, an

¹ An important role in the structure of the popular universities in Romania was established in 1993 by the Association of the Popular Universities of Romania (APUR), as an NGO with legal personality, which sets itself an ambitious program for training permanent staff and collaborating teachers from these institutions. In a relatively short period, together with IIZ-DVV-Project Romania, APUR organized between 1993–2006 over 250 professional training seminars on various topics for staff from cultural houses, village cultural houses and popular universities on the network, creating 15 zonal adult education centers in different regions of the country.

² In 2006, as a result of the expertise and practice of more than 10 years in working with European projects, APUR founds the APUR-INTERNATIONAL and continue to manage European projects in the field of vocational training and adult education within the Lifelong Learning Programs, Minerva, Justice, Daphne, Youth, and recently Erasmus+, all Programs of the EU.

invitation to work in a team, an invitation for communion.

If at the beginning the trainers were a bit reluctant to use all these very new and unknown methods for us (metaplan, NLP, future workshop, etc.) shortly they become common methods used in the seminars besides debates, teamwork etc. Below it is presented a summary of the main trans-curriculum topics and related methods used in the trainings.

A necessary plea: historical perspective, present situation, attempt to define, the energy of learning, dependence of the past and self-instruction.

Hypothesis of learning/teaching: attitude towards learning, traditional typology, dependence, the experience of the language model, self-instruction and the effect of the marketing.

Cognitive styles: observation, paradigms of learning, the additive procedure, learning deficits, the productive style and the interpretation of the environment.

Life experience: basic background, misunderstandings, the quality of the adventures, the relevance of the past, obstacles, practice the value of the spacing and evaluation of possibilities.

Social factors in learning: attitude dimensions, problems within learning groups, clarification problems, reference group, norms conflict and social climate of learning.

The role of language in learning: understanding of the achievements, means of ordering, the function of the language, difficulties in understanding, daily differentiation, dimensions of the language, objections, language mode and nominalism.

Communication difficulties: foreign words, limits of the verbal performance, versions of language using, common language, formal language, styles of languages and learning, causes of perturbation.

Attitudes in learning and success in learning: relevance of the problem, the notion of success, interpretation criteria, those who learn, what has to be learnt, those who teach the teachers, the effect of the learning, relations, participant orientation and balance.

Topics used in adult education's seminars. Among them one can mention:

Mobile working forms: impulses, intentions, the role of leading, versions of procedures, macro didactic aspect, flexibility of space and flexibility of time.

Changing of methods and their combination: motivation, hypothesis, psychological aspects of learning, problems, consequences, reference factors, and types of leading, reciprocal relation between aims and ways and combining environments.

Social forms of teaching and learning: substantiation the value of position, interaction forms, learning in roles, set of factors, work in groups, difficulties, contexts and the time factor.

Pedagogical dramaturgy: function, relevance, structuring, correlations, recommendations, flexibility of the methods, beginnings and ends, personal equation, discourse dramaturgy, forms of reaction of the courses leaders, importance of reactions of those who teach, specificity of adult education, praise and rebuke, reaction motives, introduction into the situation, mobility, forms of judgment, participant orientation and practical action.

Case study: development, limits of the inductive procedure, proposition for the development, correlation, problems regarding the achievement and versions of the examples.

Visit of the colleagues at the classes: the situation from which it starts, interpretation, quality, objections, function, awareness, and discussions about the observation, boarders, advantages and preparation.

Discussions before and after the classes: situation of the working place, premises, preliminary explanations, behavior, project method, orientation towards a practical problem of the domain of interests of the study group, activity of the learners, orientation towards a final product, and integration of the study and action.

Mental training: components, basic scheme, a non-ideological scheme, the awareness of the action, the step of information the step of theory the valorization of the results, progressive procedure, the game of the plan, the game of the military plan, the game of the plan as a mean of education, and stimulating role of the supplementary complications.

The method of moderation and technique of visualization: importance of the moderation methods, a catalyzer, the moderator, the role of visual communication, materials and necessary devices, roles of visualization, types of structures, a seminar in a local problem.

The workshop of the future: framework for creativity training, the three phases of the workshop of the future and the great effects.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

In the over 300 seminars organized in this project, we collected important feedback from the participants, considering that they had to become trainers in their organizations by multiplying the training sessions they attended. For the data processing it was used a sample of 25% of the seminars (e.g. 93 seminars) and the answers of 20 participants (on average) for each seminar.

Feedback was obtained for two important categories of information, respectively:

a) Contextual information

Seven closed items and three open ones were used in the "comments and suggestions" section. The 7 items gave each respondent the opportunity to use an evaluation scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 represents the minimum level and 5 represents the maximum level), to assess:

1. relevance of the presentations made in relation to the topics of the seminars;
2. relevance of the presentations made in relation to the training needs of the participants;
3. activity of the trainers from the point of view of communication skills;
4. the activity of the trainers from the point of view of the relationship with the participants;
5. running the event from the point of view of the visual medium used (in presentations / materials);
6. volume of information offered / discussed;
7. subsequent use of information obtained for the future professional activity.

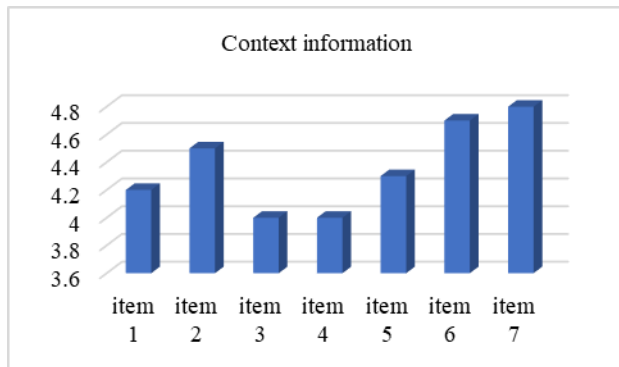


Fig. 1. Context response scores.

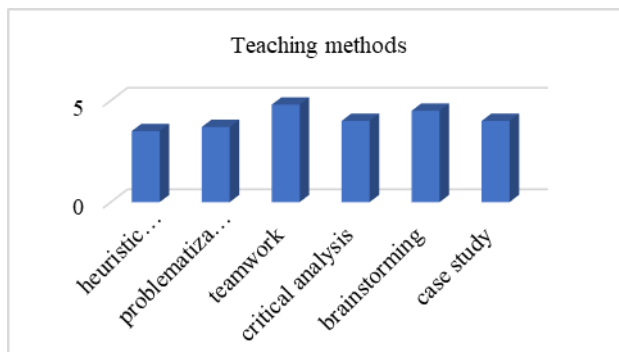


Fig. 2. Teaching methods.

From Fig. 1 it is observed that the highest percentage of appraisals was obtained for items 6 and 7, respectively "the volume of information offered / discussed" and "the subsequent use of the professional activity of the information obtained for the future professional activity". This result is encouraging, given that the participants have also become trainers (item 7).

b) Teaching and assessment methods

For the same samples described in point a) it was investigated the opinion of the participants regarding the appreciation of the teaching methods of the project's trainers, on the one hand, and the assessment methods during and at the end of seminars, on the other hand. Regarding the teaching methods, the participants were instructed to consider only the active-participative methods, namely heuristic conversation, problematization, teamwork, critical analysis; brainstorming and case study. The results are shown in Fig. 2 and it is noted that the participants chose "teamwork" as the main method they appreciated.

Regarding the assessment methods used by the trainers, the participants had a choice of the following: multiple choice items, open-ended questions, small projects and portfolios. As shown in Fig. 3, participants chose "small projects" as their preferred method of assessment. This correlates well with the teaching method (teamwork), as the small project assessment method involved the teamwork.

5. LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

There is all know how important the legislation is and which impact it has. Therefore, the special attention was devoted to the subject of "adult education law", because

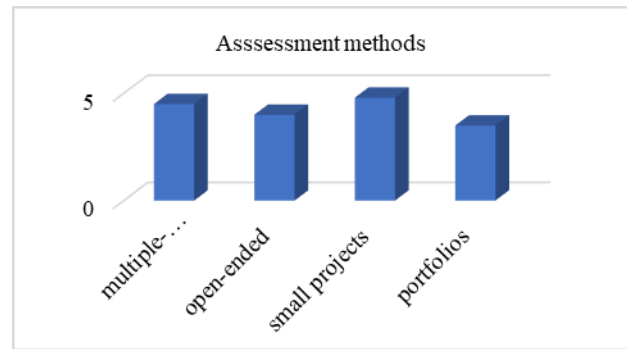


Fig. 3. Assessment methods.

the legal foundations fundamentally support and safeguard the extracurricular education system. The project started in 1994 with a first workshop to discuss the basic items of a law on adult education.

Other workshops followed with representatives of cultural houses, adult education centres, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, National Agency for Labour Force and Occupation and others. Finally, the initiative led to the following results.

- 1994: promotion of the term "adult education" and introduction into legislation;
- 1995: finalization of the legislative initiative regarding "lifelong learning", which led to the chapter of the Education Act;
- 2000: legislation on adult education with elements of the DVV project;
- 2003: law no. 292/2003 on the organisation and functioning of cultural establishments; explicit mention of RAEC (Regional Centres of Adult Education);
- 2006 to present: new initiatives to promote uniform laws on adult education in cooperation with Parliament (continuous progress).

On the other hand, it made sense to establish adult education as a long-term topic in educational sciences at university level. We therefore contacted universities in Germany to discuss the topic of adult education as a possible subject of university study in Romania.

Initial meetings of German professors with Romanian university colleagues, in particular with the Bucharest University, were successful and led to a fruitful exchange. The results were an increased interest in adult education at university level, leading in some cases to establishing topics of adult education (e.g. basic skills, non-formal and informal learning etc.) into the curriculum of the Education Sciences. Also, there was an initial cooperation between the staff members of some universities, mainly from Bucharest, Cluj, Iași and Timișoara. Two results of this cooperation should be mentioned here: the first national conference for adult education in Romania held in 2001 at the West University of Timișoara, and the Master of Adult Education (University of Iasi as leading partner).

6. FINANCING ISSUES

DVV International finances its work with funds from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. This was also the case for the Romanian project. The largest part of the financial resources was

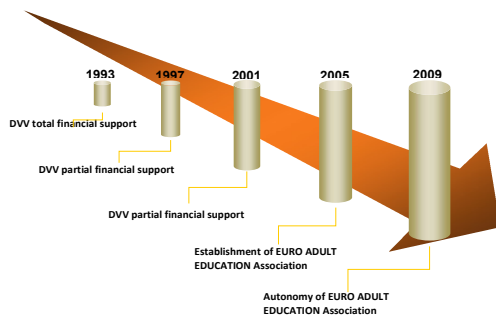


Fig. 4. Projects Financing.

used for the capacity building of the cultural centres and Popular Universities for the development of both human and material resources (e.g. technical equipment for courses and necessary equipment for the institution).

Unfortunately, the financial resources were reduced over the years (Fig. 4). After the end of the project and continuation of the work by Euro Adult Education other financial resources had to be requisitioned from e.g. EU Social Funds, EU projects etc.

Euro Adult Education is still active today. The focus is on vocational training and further education, certificates for European Business Competence Licence, EBCL and Xpert PBS as well as advanced training courses in negotiation language, management etc.

7. THE ROMANIAN EXTRACURRICULAR EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT ON THE PARTICIPANTS

The notion of *adult education* and *continuous education* are overlapping in the sense that the second term is focussing more on the *continuous training all over the professional carrier* according to the labour market demands.

In Romania, the adult education is addressing to the complexity of the education dimensions, alternative, necessary to be covered (e.g. citizenship, cultural, spare time, designated to social marginalized target group or education intervention for specific target groups such as senior citizens, housekeeper women, unemployed, ethnic minorities, immigrants).

The adult education institutions have a different structure, according to their size, the responsibilities and the connection to [6]:

- *Activity field* – they have exclusively adult education activities or perform other types of activities;
- *Target-oriented offer addressability* – the offer is opened to numerous adult categories or is focussed on certain target-groups;
- *Their appartenance* – some of them are parts of larger organizational structure (e.g. employer's and union's organizations, churches, etc.) or independent organizations;
- *Their interests* – commercial (e.g. continuous training centres, organized as commercial companies), educational (e.g. schools and training providers), social (e.g. the churches' services, humanitarian

organizations), public (cultural houses, village cultural houses etc.) or organizational (e.g. centres established within big companies);

- *Their legal status* – public or private;
- Their area of offer – encompasses the whole areas of adult education activities (e.g. popular universities) or concentrates on certain field activity (e.g. informatics centre or foreign languages centre).

In this context, the role of adult education implies:

- *regulation* (ministries, which initiate legislation in education, culture etc. and coordinate the continuous training – for example, the Ministry of Labour);
- *organization/coordination* at national or local level some of adult education activities (e.g. the National Agency for Labour Force and Occupation and its territorial structures which have also organization and coordination attributions at national and local level and the National Authority for Qualification which coordinates at national level the authorization of the assessment centres for the validation of the non-formal and informal learning);
- *delivering services* in adult education domain (a large range of public and private institutions which perform adult education activities in different fields).

As stated before, the project's focus was on the adult education organizations under the Ministry of Culture. It promotes the adult education through the following institutions and activities as well as gave statistic data about these establishments:

- *cultural establishments* (in Romanian – *Așezăminte culturale*): popular universities, libraries, museums, cultural houses, village cultural houses, county centres which preserve and promote traditional culture, popular arts schools, county directions for culture. These institutions belong to the local authorities.
- *activities*: training courses, conferences, popular art and tradition promotion, festivals, exhibitions, book presentations and launching etc.

With reference to the situation of the cultural establishments, the evolution of data along all these years is as follows [6]:

In 1989 there were 200 cultural houses with almost 3000 popular universities as distinctive departments, a national network of libraries, museums, popular art schools, centres for popular art which promoted adult education.

In 2002 the number of popular universities decreased to 152. Among these, less than 10 have juridical person, all the others functioning as departments within the cultural houses or village cultural houses.

In 2002 there were 228 *cultural houses*, the most of them have mainly cultural and artistically attributions.

In 2002 there were 6177 *village cultural houses*, represented the rural centres for culture and education.

In 2002 in each of the 41 counties and in Bucharest there was a *Popular art school* which offered theoretic and practical courses in music, fine arts etc.

Along with other components of the educational infrastructure (e.g. schools, community centers for lifelong learning, etc.), libraries and cultural centers play an important role in disseminating education and culture

to the rural population. Moreover, given this important role these cultural institutions were linked in regional and national networks, and the Project was easier to be implemented using this educational and cultural infrastructure.

The situation of the cultural establishments nowadays. During the last 10–15 years, a continuous degradation of the cultural environment of Romania has been observed due to the reduction of the financial support granted to the field, both from the public budget and from the private donors. This situation has reached alarming aspects in many rural areas, where most village cultural houses (about 97%) have their own headquarters but their equipment is unsatisfactory (for about 80%) or they have stopped working and serve other destinations. The situation of libraries is also characterized by a downward trend, more or less similar to other domains in the cultural life of the villages [4].

8. LESSONS LEARNED IN THE PROJECT

The cooperation with the German partner organisation helped us to choose from a wealth of topics, methods and concepts what was most important or useful for the Romania institutions. At the same time, the cooperation in the project brought various institutions closer to each other (e.g. training providers, cultural houses, libraries, local communities etc.). In this way, the participants in the project felt more and more as one big family, which ultimately benefited their further work as trainers.

Moreover, the participants mastered new topics and new teaching and assessment methods in adult education (exemplified in pars. 4 and 5) which have been further implemented in other trainings. One role of the project was to monitor the sustainability of all these achievements.

All these effects of the serious and professional work in cooperation with the German colleagues were multiplied on the popular universities and other partners at local and regional level inspiring and convincing them about the role and mission of non-formal and informal education on their life quality.

The major impact of implementing DVV-Germany projects in Romania can be seen institutionally (the popular universities and the houses of culture) but also personally and, of course, socially. Although they used to have a certain tradition, popular universities were given a different rhythm, another direction with true European values, as the human aspect got new dimensions and new connotations.

The focus shifted from the abstract approach towards the one of personal development, with lectures, seminars, tutorials and cultural exchanges, for the practical benefit of the participants.

The seminars led by EU experts, the tutorials from countries such as Germany, UK, Denmark were very important for the development of adult learning in the culture area.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Getting the focus on training and further education of the staff was a very good decision. This enabled in-depth discussions on the management of institutions, needed analysis, program development, advertising, selection of trainers of trainers as well as of teachers trainers. All participants in this project have carried out the activities with full commitment. This has made a decisive contribution to the success of the project in both its impact and further sustainability.

A very important result that emerged from this project was the feedback collected from the participants in the 372 organized seminars. As it was mentioned above feedback was obtained for two important categories of information, respectively contextual information and teaching and assessment methods. Moreover, from the open questions of the questionnaires resulted hundreds of testimonials, in which the participants appreciated the opportunity to acquire the professional, social, managerial and cultural competences to become trainers.

Finally, it should be mentioned with priority that one of the main results of the DVV International described project (e.g. Promoting Adult education in Romania) is that it established the basis on which future projects of APUR and APUR-International continued to build on.

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