



## EDUCATION – PART OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract** *Education is an important part of economy, as it has direct results over the social, cultural and economic formation of the individual. Today's education system is more and more oriented towards training students in an efficient manner. We live in an "information era", where the main focus is not mainly on knowledge, but rather on the manner in which this knowledge is used in order to obtain performance. However, the problem of this field's underfinancing in countries such as Romania is a real one. These economic coordinates prove that education means more than the formal education provided in schools. Moreover, those businesses that have an education oriented activity field have known a continuous development. We refer not only to educational institutions, but also to clubs which offer a great variety of courses for children. We will also bring into discussion the different perspectives offered by educational systems such as Montessori or Waldorf.*

**Key words:**

Education, sustainable development, educational alternatives

**JEL Codes:**

N30

### 1. Introduction

Economy and education are two intertwined concepts, as the actions of the first have major effects over the sphere of the second one and the other way around. A healthy economy is the direct result of a healthy educational system, either public or private. The new society is an information type of society and represents a challenge for anyone who wants to understand it or simply be a part of it. Moreover, the information society has determined major changes at the level of labor market, and innovation and creativity have become basic requirements in what regards the employees' work. This thing requires a minimum amount of computer skills. Moreover, these two demands are lately becoming more and more important in the field of education.

Information is doubtless the most important element provided by the Internet. The development of the Internet and the use of IT&C technologies, as well as the development of the concept of information society has led to major changes in the field of how the human resources are being used. One of the most important aspect of today's educational system is the fact that it focuses on a continuous type of education, even (or better said especially) in the case of adults.

An important form of education is the one that aims at training the adults through evening classes. However, despite its name, this type of education is held during the day or, in the best case, in the afternoon, not giving the students the opportunity of fully attending the

lectures. The main goal of this type of education is that of effectively integrating the graduates on the labor market. The difficulty of achieving this goal resides in the fact that most of the time the age limit of these graduates is very high. Therefore, the major problem after graduation is the employers' reticence in hiring this type of graduates.

It is also necessary to bring into discussion the issues that are very likely to appear during the schooling period of this type of formal education. Most of the times, the students are in fact employees that need a high-school diploma in order to be legally employed by various economic agents or companies. Therefore, they are less likely to fully attend the classes in comparison to other students enrolled in the full-time study mode. In order to solve this problem, the government should take into account various methods of stimulating their interest in school. We are fully aware of the fact that the government provides funds for stimulating the students' interest in education, one major example being the scholarships given to those who choose to attend a 2 or 3 years vocational cycle of education.

It is far easier to train kindergarten children to be future effective members of an information society than to train adults that have already been taught to follow orders, rather than using their own imagination and creativity. Children are more shapeable than adults, because the latter bear the traces of another type of education, one which didn't allow any kind of self-contribution.

Nowadays, the adults are given the opportunity of a lifelong education by means of a program called *The Second Chance*. In addition to this education program, there are a lot of other programs that invest in the concept of e-learning.

Increasing the creativity has become lately the most important goal of education, as its results have direct effects on the economy. If the teacher aims at developing the student's sense of imagination and independency, then the student will later become an effective member of his society. Moreover, as the goal of any individual is to increase not only the incomes, but also the welfare of him and his family, then it would not be inappropriate to say that the sense of creativity achieved in school will help the same individual to use in an efficient manner all the economic resources that he would encounter during his lifelong journey in an economic society. A major issue of today's society is that not all its members were trained to be independent. The best example of such a system that didn't want to provide its apprentices a high sense of independence is the educational system before 1989 - the communist type of school. A vast majority of today's employees is represented by products of this system, therefore they either lack creativity or independence (or both, in the worst case) or they are struggling to fit into a highly competitive economic market. In order to increase the effectiveness of this type of employees, the employers need to invest money in the career development domain. Companies invest a lot of money in order to ensure that their employees are the best on the labor market. Even when it comes to young employees – who are supposed to possess the latest information in the domain in which they activate – companies organize training courses or training camps. By means of this type of activities, companies want not only to provide their employees information in a specific field, but also to develop a strong connection between them as independent individuals, who have their own opinions and who are not afraid to share them to a larger community. In fact, if we take a look at the current educational system that includes alternative subsystems such as the Montessori or Waldorf education types, we will become even more aware of the fact that creativity and independence are two of the basic elements of the specific educational systems mentioned above. Children are being taught from an early age how to interact in an efficient manner with the others around them, in order not to accomplish a certain task, but to develop their own personality and cognitive system. The company that best uses the entire potential of its employees is the best on the economic market. But it all depends on the way in which the employees were educated. If they possess a highly developed team spirit, then they will ensure the

company's financial development, due to the following factors:

- They are more dynamic and also able to mobilize quicker under stress conditions;
- They are receptive to continuous development, at a both professional and personal level;
- They are more likely to understand the fact that they are required to develop their individual qualities that are favorable when it comes to cooperation and interdependency;
- They actively communicate in order to focus on the major objectives that need to be achieved, and in this way they strengthen the cohesion inside the company [Roşca, C. et al 2005:367].

## 2. Educational Alternatives

In what regards the main features of the Waldorf system, we must take into account the fact that the individual represents a plurality of systems, and education should be looked at as a whole, through its own development rhythm. The Montessori system is based on a total liberty of the educational activity, allowing the child to undergo a transformation by means of his own forces in order to discover his creative potential. However, the great results obtained by children project the educational and financial objectives. From an economic point of view, the effort of opening a school based on this educational system is a major one, but the profit seems to be guaranteed. Despite all these things, we cannot fail to notice a series of obstacles on the path of the financial development of this type of economic agent. A first obstacle is represented by the conceptual differences between the traditional and the innovative educational systems. In both cases, it is necessary a variety of courses that would be able to identify the natural abilities of students. This implies not only a rich offer, but also providing an exceptional educational experience. Therefore, an important role is played by the human resource, as the teachers need to be truly devoted to that precise activity and moreover they should be perfectly aware of the methodology involved. Even if an education unit possesses this type of resource, this doesn't mean that it will make profit. As in the case of any other business, the dominant focus is towards the customer. But in this case we can identify another obstacle. The parental prototype of today's child is not fully aware of this type of educational alternatives, thinking that the child would find it difficult to make the shift towards a traditional educational system – that focuses on gathering information and reproduce it afterwards - and change his creativity oriented educational formation. In fact, the current curricula does not focus on discovering and developing the child's creativity, but it aims towards reaching some

fixed goals without taking into account the child's individuality. Under these circumstances, it becomes easier to explain the activity of clubs or courses such as dancing, acting, modelling etc. The recipe for success is a simple one: an attracting space, a rich offer, and well-trained personnel. A satisfied parent is the best advertisement ever, but the one who should be really happy is the child. Therefore, even though the prices of courses such as those mentioned above are pretty high, they do not lack requests. They focus on non-formal and informal education, in addition to the formal education in schools. On the other hand, the Romanian market has been lately invaded by all sorts of educational centers that promise to discover the child's potential, regardless the age. We do not deny the utility of activities such as painting or dancing, but it is hard to believe that a 2 years old child not participating at this type of activities will not properly develop. Therefore, parents have the difficult task of determining the necessity degree of these types of activities.

A particular aspect is held by step-by-step and after-school alternatives. The step-by-step programme implies the concept of workshops, allowing each child to evolve in his own rhythm. Private kindergartens integrate this reality into their program, offering a wide range of activities. The child participates to dance, swimming, English or German lessons, these courses being paid by parents, of course. Taking into account the overcrowding of groups in the state system or the amounts of money that have to be paid by the parents, the financial alternate of enrolling the child in a private kindergarten seems to be a good solution. The financial potential of this kind of business is universally acknowledged, but experience has proved the fact that the path of a business needs to be a continuous one, in order to survive under conditions of maximum competitiveness, without giving up the aspect regarding the quality of services. In what regards the primary school education or the secondary one, the after-school alternative is a reality. The economic agents that provide this kind of educational services believe that is easier for a child to do his homework with a teacher than to wait for his parents to come home from work. Under these circumstances, the parent prefers to pay for both permanent surveillance and a warm meal for his child. In this situation, the profit is divided between the economic agent and its partners. However, it is difficult to maintain the price because of the cost of educational resources, food, utilities and didactic process. Under these circumstances, the cost of enrolling a child in an after-school raises up to 220 lei. Taking into account the Romanian families' economic situation, it is easy to understand that the number of pupils participating to this type of activities is not very high. Moreover, the number of secondary school pupils

is pretty low. This thing is due to both high costs and the fact that the pupil faces a wide educational field and he needs to fulfill the teacher's expectations. Because of this thing, this niche segment is not a very profitable one unless it sets up the age target between 6 and 11.

### **3. Private Educational System**

A spectacular development in the educational environment is that of private schools, mainly high-schools and universities. Four or five years ago, the number of pupils passing the baccalaureate exam was very high and almost all of them applied to various universities. This thing increased the number of private high-schools. However, private high-schools have become known not for extraordinary results, but for medium ones. The tendency is for pupils to transfer from private to public high-school institutions, because of high costs and low quality. The latter element – the relation between the actual quality of the educational process and the pseudo-quality of the results at national exams – has led to a change of perspective in what regards the traditional education system. However, private universities were perceived in a better way. Taking into account the decrease of funded places at state universities and the high value of the annual fee, the process of enrolling in private universities was a real successful alternative. From a financial point of view, economic agents mainly survive due to a constant number of students. This is the current issue that these universities are facing nowadays, as the school population is constantly decreasing and the number of pupils graduating from high-school is not very high. Another difficulty is the fact that students do not acknowledge anymore the importance of having a diploma. The market is oversaturated with university graduates who are facing major difficulties in finding a job. Therefore, the universities need to request accreditations for new study fields that will have immediate applicability, so that graduating will equal the insertion into the labor market. Moreover, the value of a university is in fact the value of its students. And the quality of students is a major problem of the current educational system. In order to become more attractive, private universities follow the example of traditional public universities and offer various possibilities such as partnerships or scholarships. Hence, we consider that in the private environment, education represents the main goal, as these institutions are constantly struggling in order to become a qualitative alternative to public education.

### **4. The Market of Educational Auxiliaries**

Over the last few years, most of the publishing houses have been offering a wide range of didactic auxiliaries.

Acknowledging the fact that the market is based on the same traditional offer-demand relationship, they started to collaborate with teachers, so that their products would respond to the specific requests of the curricula. However, quality became a second target, after quantity. Many didactic auxiliaries contained the answers to various evaluation items, taking the pupil the possibility of solving the exercises alone. Moreover, lowering the price in case of a high order does not represent a valid argument of purchasing a book. We should also mention that the competition on the market determines a poor marketing strategy. The recipe for success is not an aggressive advertisement, but resides in the quality of the products offered by these publishing houses.

## 5. Conclusions

What the Montessori or Waldorf educational systems try to teach children is the fact that the existence and correct functioning of groups (that will later become work groups) are stimulating, as they improve their members' efficiency and the sense of commitment. Hence, the direct consequence that these types of education tend to achieve is a sustainable development not only of society, but also of economy. Terri Willard and Michael Halder say that „the World Summit on the Information Society provide an excellent opportunity to integrate sustainable development principles and practices into the institutions and policy frameworks that are shaping the information society” [Willard, Terri and Michael Halder, 2003]. This affirmation implies the idea that the current organizations and institutions responsible for a sustainable development of economy are making great efforts in order to implement efficient development principles. The costs of such activities could be significantly reduced if the state would focus on an efficient educational training of children and young adults. Education should become the state's priority. Moreover, the state should understand that investing in children does not equal bankruptcy, but a smart way of avoiding much higher further costs. In fact, education is not only the trigger that leads to an economic capital, but it also directly connected to the concept of social capital.

The concept brought into the discussion - that of social capital - is referred to by Francis Fukuyama as being „an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals” (Francis Fukuyama, *Social Capital and Civil Society*) [3]. In order to achieve a highly qualitative social and economic capital, it is necessary to invest not only in formal education, but also in informal education. Nowadays, even public schools are developing a wide range of extracurricular activities by means of which they aim at enriching their students' moral, cultural, social and, why

not, even economic principles. A healthy economy is the result of a healthy manner of thinking that can be only achieved/implemented in childhood. Today's society and economy do not need only abstract thinking and plain or arid intelligences, but passionate individuals. These passionate members of today's and tomorrow's society should have also been educated for acknowledging the importance of a sustainable development. By means of a sustainable development, we, as members of an information society, should be able to provide not only the present, but also the future generation the possibility to satisfy their needs, without compromising the environment's resources [Andrei Octavian Paraschivescu, 2007].

Confucius once said that nature makes us all the same, while education makes us different. There is indeed a reality that cannot be denied and this reality refers to the fact that education brings along a social status. Therefore, the current society perceives education as a key concept which includes not only an ideational level, but also a pragmatic one.

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