

TODAY'S YOUTH AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTUAL RADIOGRAPHS AND MEANINGS

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Abstract

The analysis of the young generation's evolution within the adults' social, informational and professional space is definable in an integrative manner by taking into account values such as: globality, competence, competition, knowledge society, instrumental informational communication, standards of quality, innovative motivation a.s.o. According to the views expressed in the study, the following can be considered as obvious sustainable arguments in evaluating the processes and progress made in the youth' professional development: the size of the investment value in training human resources, the stability of educational policy strategies, the quality of the basic and transversal competencies specific to the system/National framework for professional qualification, the effectiveness of information technology usability and efficiency indicators, the valorisation of personal and institutional continuous learning projects.

Keywords: globalization, continuous learning, professional competence, useful knowledge

Context and value connections

A review of the passage from the model or from the reality of being young towards becoming an adult is not at all simple. This is particularly true if what we wish are not generalized or subjectively adjusted reflections to make them facilitating and not opposable with respect to what we used to be yesterday, we, today's adults. We envisage rather to assume the status of counselors, of reflective actors, useful in identifying, acceding and using better the information sources, instruments and experiences that can prepare the young person of today for the world of tomorrow. We envisage the young person still studying in lecture halls, practising the exercises of sound learning within the logic of professionalism, wishing to master sets of basic and transversal competencies which should ensure them opportunities and chances to a work place on the competition market. A market which has become unpredictable as to its standards of quality and competitiveness.

The context is well-known, but not yet sustainable enough from the point of view of the value of globality, of the useful knowledge competition, of the motivations generating impulses towards a performant professional route, of the realistic premises regarding the achievement of the personal

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project, as well as of the limits upon facing the possible risks and blockages of a society with difficult to anticipate changes and innovations. Justifiedly, the context demands yet another type of political, economic, social, cultural and educational management, maybe even a performant strategic self-management.

Moreover, a new conception as regards the standards visibility is necessary, especially with a view to their centering upon: the substantiality of the tests for creation and added values, the quality of the models of interactivity and social cohesion, the discipline of the effort invested in professional training, the power of motivation and the efficiency of the mental element and of the derived actions under poorly determined conditions, but which are under the incidence of the information or highly informatized society.

The young generation and the adults' expectations are equally connected to the information society paradigm by means of audacious projects requiring significant investment in scientific research, in education and professional training, in sustainable development and innovation. The drawing up and observance of quality standards in the training for a profession/set of profession become firm options, in order to get an active life style, as well as viable social-moral and characterial values.

The thus defined project does not necessarily mean that the actions proposed are successful. The international competition is often hard to face. The ever more numerous competitors' conduct is also unpredictable, not always governed by deontological standards and transparency. The observance of the game rules falls under the incidence of unwanted rivalries, of the explosion and evolution of new competitors both from the traditionally powerful countries – the USA and Japan, the strong arch of EU-7 as well as, more recently, from the emergent countries, such as China, India, Malaysia, Brazil, South Korea or Singapore.

Supporting arguments. Predictable consequences

The strategically oriented analysis shows us that the arguments regarding the conditions of evaluation of the progress in the field of technologies applied to education, professional training and formal education in particular can be placed in several areas of interest, which can be observed and defined as priority options from the value viewpoint. Here are some of those useful to our analysis.

a. The percent from the GNP given to education as a whole, with flexible balancing and prioritizing among its components – basic education (education for all), vocational education, higher education, research and innovation in education, nonformal education etc. (total percent – over 6 - 8%).

b. Strategies of educational policy oriented to finishing high school, post high school and university studies, against the background of achieving the necessary balancing in order to have a competitive market of highly qualified human resources.

c. Reducing the gaps between people who have a degree, a recognized form of qualification, their chances on a labour market with oscillating supply. From the perspective of the informational society those statistical data will get relevance that is meant to support, by their evolution, the generation of positive images such as: (i) the rate of unemployment with young people of 15 -24 years of age, on levels of education, residence and sexes, which should as low as possible; (ii) the rate of employment of the population aged 15 – 24, on levels of education, residence environments and sexes, which should be significant; (iii) the rate of insertion of the graduates of various education and vocational training levels in the labour market over the last 10 years, which should be progressive and relevant for the evaluation of the examined situations.

d. Another statistical argument could be represented by the examination of the indicators expressing the relationships between the potential of the young generation and its status as a user of the community instrumental values, viz. connection to the Internet, as an element of the information technology. For an area considered essential for the analysis, we mention: on the EU-27 territory, estimations would show that in 2007 most of the firms, as well as 54% of the households (domestic consumers) had access to the Internet. Major differences were identified at national level: 83% of the households in the Netherlands had access to the Internet, while in Bulgaria only 19%. This shows also minimal competencies in terms of information technology usage. The EU target is the rapid reduction of the digital gap.

e. A strong argument in the area examined is the positive involvement (and not a negative one, as that of the Romanian hackers is considered) of the young generation in the research and development of the new information technologies, against the background of certain significant investment from the GNP. Thus, in the EU, the average is 1.83%, in the USA it is 2.6%, in Japan – 3.15 %. We should note though that for some EU countries, such as Finland and Sweden, the percent is higher, while in other respects it is much lower.

The consequences of the intensive use of the information technology are sometimes resented more strongly as far as the work quality is concerned, which becomes cognitive information itself, structured and functional, creating professionalism and added value. At the same time, the information technology, as an intensive source of professionalism can be found reflected in the quality, democratic character, efficiency and responsibility of the interactivity between the social, administrative, juridical, economic, cultural and political institutions and the labour market. The consequences can be identified at the level of the personal projects of the young generation. More

explicitly, the information technology is reflected in the visible transformations taking place at the level of guidepost indicators such as:

- independence / autonomy of projects;
- access, reliability , communication;
- chance of knowing and getting a job;
- level of command over the know-how of a set of professions;
- quality of spending free time;
- adaptability to the nature of the organizations and of labour, with the redesigning of the activities borderlines (ap. Duval, 2000).
- redistribution of the networks concerning the workforce supply on a market menaced by automatisms, compressions and unpredictability.

Critical examination, constructive signposts and models

Speaking about the logic of availability of Information and communication technology, especially as digital information in networks of education, a young researcher and teacher (8) mentioned some facilities of this technology for the educational area. We present them below, introducing a significant note of personalization:

- Solving the learning problems by using the available information;
- Formulating questions which orient the discovery and getting knowledge about the world around at a faster pace, perhaps, though more superficial;
- Increased interactivity, especially at the level of generations, without eluding the presence of certain tensions;
- Multiplied, rapid and low cost sources of information;
- Organizational facilities, modular, without constraints for a varied and sometimes geographically dispersed population;
- Reduction of barriers to the adults' continuous education/learning, without the interruption of the professional tasks and timing;
- Flexible passage towards the new economy as a result of rapid easy cheap accessing, processing and storing;
- Implementation of the modern economy, based on three modalities – digital, of network and informational – which ensure the flexibility, mobility of combinations and the sources globalization;
- Generation of an open inspired humanistic reflective state of mind, avoiding the limitations of the technological determinism and identifying new forms of manifestation of the connections between the formal and the nonformal a.s.o.

The attentive inventory of the above indicators raises some problems particularly connected with: a new vision of the young generation over the “globalization” paradigm and the reduction of the contradiction among the centres of interest at the level of the state policy and of the private ones.

Let us examine them in a synthetic manner, also invoking the young generation transformative collective mental element:

a) Globalization, the youth and the informational society. The triad imposes the presence of some key concepts, some in the area of certain tensions such as: income vs profit; safe work places vs the human resources and the capital dynamic; protection vs discretionary regulation of technological transfer and of innovation; forming of competencies and their transparency vs competitiveness with the preservation of the technological secret; innovative vision by egocentric values vs the vision of strategic alliances and niches, with stress on the respect for intellectual property.

b) The European youth and the educational European policies. To note here the expectations and requirements oriented mainly towards: availability and increased access to the support services, to the electronic educational programs, to the cultural heritage in digital format, the multiplication of the media sources in different languages, the existence of good practices guides, the design of new learning strategies and methods, the formation of teaching staff performant in terms of scientific, pedagogic and digital competencies.

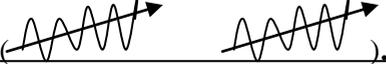
c) Youth, associative spirit and globalization. The optimistic vision regarding the happy globalization was sometimes promoted by the so-called ideological consensus, which is no longer shared today by all the young people. They believe, as stated in the French newspaper *Liberation*, that “another world can be built”, avoiding the radical fissures in the order of things by means of a generalized movement known as ‘altermondialism’.

The motivations are linked to the unfair character of the North – South relationships, the impossibility of avoiding crises connected to financial speculations or the salvation of the cultural diversity of the world, the inappropriate fragmentation of the public space, reluctance to the (still debatable) hypothesis of the global warming effects. As a theory, globalization used to be at the beginning (as Robert Reich, the USA Labour Secretary, would write in 1991), in its essence, of an economic nature, the commercial, industrial and financial institutions would be interconnected and homogeneous, while the information and communication technology, including long distance education would follow that trend.

It would be important to ask: which of the social change models and theories specific to Eastern-European countries (see Ingemar Fagerling and Lawrence Saha’s analyses, 1989) can offer today an optional field favourable to the young generation raise? We can examine them, accepting the functionality of the diagrammatic comparative criterion below, based on expert type analyses (see Cummings, 1999, pp. 37-38):

i) traditional cyclic model );

ii) leap model );

- iii) linear ascending model ();
- iv) cyclic linear model ();
- v) parallel cyclic linear model ().

Today modern developed states (such as the USA, the EU countries, Japan, but also China, India, Singapore, Brazil a.s.o.) draw up alternative scenarios at social-economic and technological level, meant to anticipate the direction and tendency of the changes, with impact on the educational institutions and services. Certainly, we cannot omit the alerting conscience as to the unpredictable obstacles or effects in these areas. We can exemplify, in this context, several points in the USA strategy for the training of the youth as workforce (Johnston, Parker, 1993):

- Rebalancing of the economy development and the integration of the world's economies;
- Management of the disinflation – deflation cycles in the price policies;
- Competition and competitiveness in/on the work market between the traditional economic powers and the emergent powers, which have become big competitors;
- The dramatic burst of the new advanced technologies and their effects in information communication, artificial intelligence, informational storing and processing, nanotechnologies, the dialogue in any language, robotics, manipulative biologies, biogenetic interactions.

Youth, education and continuous learning

C. Ulrich, 2009, would rightfully ask, invoking the issues of learning: what are the results of learning; what is most important as a result of learning? The answers, slightly dubitably formulated, if we mention some other reputed authors as well, (see A. Coulon, 1997), would revolve, and are still revolving, around the following conduct values:

- too high concentration on the curriculum, the special perspective on the content indicating insufficient concern for "the changes which have a direct connection with life and with the development of identity, attitudes, values, systems of beliefs, behavioural dispositions, strategies of analysis and of action (9, p. 23);
- attraction for the answers to the question "what do the young people know?";
- insufficient interest in providing valid answers to two other questions: "who are the young people today?" and "what will the adults of tomorrow look like?";

- what are the dominant values/the table of values according to which we design, ever since we are in school and lecture halls in universities, the roles, statuses and competences of the people of tomorrow?

Ontologically speaking, the same author states: learning produces changes not only in terms of what the learner knows, but also in what the learner is, ... what new practices they have internalized, what positions they could occupy in the community (including in what the American specialists call „learning communities”, communities of practice, Wenger, 2002), what changes are taking place or could take place from the perspective of the self own identity.

In such a context, universities are interested in creating the favourable premises for the rational growth of investment in the human capital, the promotion of the image of excellence and professionalism in the space of the information society by the research development and innovation strategies, the drawing up and implementation of the European Qualifications Framework. We place here the accepted community strategy that is able to reflect the effectiveness, efficiency, transfer, transparency and recognition of qualifications and competencies at European level, to introduce quality standards in the evaluation of progress and results of professional learning (see also the activities of the ACPART organization).

A good practice we can invoke is represented by the strategy of the University of Bucharest (acronym UB), which, in a synthesis document concerning ensuring quality, mentioned some generic ideas with a value of strategic objectives: the active insertion of the students in the professional domains they are studying for; extensions of collaboration between the faculty and the private work environment; the fast adaptation of the study programs to the new demands of the labour market; the increase of the students' visibility on the labour market, their monitoring and the development of studies during the practical training stage; the development of strategies for ensuring the presence of the mass media in view of increasing the indicators of quality, of transparency and visibility of the UB performances, by the informational channels and fluxes, of the online presence, of sites in flexible format, of the new informational technologies.

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