

EDUCATIONAL DIMENSIONS FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND VOLUNTEERING IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES

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Abstract

The education for active citizenship, a goal of the contemporary educational systems, included by UNESCO in the category of new education forms, becomes today a component that may be integrated in the educational programs, regardless the contextual or cultural patterns. This study provides views of approaching the relationship between *the education for active citizenship and volunteering and the experiential learning, the education for active citizenship and volunteering and the intercultural learning*, through references to research studies and theories validated by community norms.

Keywords: *education for active citizenship, volunteering, experiential learning, multiculturalism.*

1. Theoretical aspects of defining the education for active citizenship and volunteering

The field of action covered by the terminology used in the definition of the concept of education for active citizenship, in both the Romanian and international literature, is so vast that any attempt to avoid the operationalization stage generates ambiguity and a wide and standardized field of action. Davies (2003) identified over 300 definitions of the *active citizenship*. For the classification of this statements, the author considers that the knowledge of the *citizen* concept is sufficient for determining the meanings of the *citizenship* concept, with three validated versions, that can be used simultaneously. Citizenship is closely related to: a citizen' statute, and identity; the achievements of a citizen in terms of rights and obligations; the set of proved practices, as a member of the society.

Bîrzea (2005) presents several versions which are synonymous to the concept of *active citizenship education*. *Democratic citizenship, civic education, political education, citizenship education, social education, human rights education* are concrete representations of active citizenship education. Bîrzea states that the active citizenship education is a set of practices and activities aimed to “providing the best training to youth and adults for an active involvement in the democratic life, by assuming and exercising their rights and responsibilities in the society” (Bîrzea, 2005: 35). We identify the following patterns that contribute to the

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achievement of an almost exhaustive definition: active citizenship education is a life experience; its purpose is to prepare individuals and communities for civic and political participation; it involves observing the rights and taking responsibilities; it enhances the social and cultural diversity.

During the *Conferences of Ministers of Education* (2000), organized in Cracow, by the Council of Europe, the following patterns have been stated: active citizenship education is based on fundamental principles of human rights, pluralistic democracy and the supremacy of the law; it envisages the fight against violence, xenophobia, racism, aggression and intolerance; it includes courses of actions adjusted to the specific time and local context. The European Commission (2008) defines eight key competences, necessary for the achievement of personal development, active citizenship, social and professional inclusion, in a knowledge based society: communication skills in mother tongue, communication skills in foreign languages, mathematical skills and basic scientific and technological skills, digital skills, learning skills, *initiative development and entrepreneurial skills, intercultural skills, social and civic skills*. The unitary approach, by using inter/cross-disciplinary strategies of the abovementioned skills, enables the active citizenship education to be included in the structure of each category. In relation to its applicability, active citizenship education results in: volunteering activities, project implementation, training, discussions, debates.

According to the *Study on Active Citizenship Education* (DG Education and Culture, European Commission, 2007: 28), the weight of volunteering activities, seen as an effective application of the active citizenship education, is relatively low compared with the project implementation activities or those specific to debates, campaigns (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Practical applications of active citizenship education

Activity	
Volunteering activities	19%
Campaigns	12%
Discussions, debates	49%
Project implementation, learning through action	44%
Learning new competences	49%
Mobilities	16%
Networks, partnerships	32%

Source: *Study on Active Citizenship Education*, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, 2007.

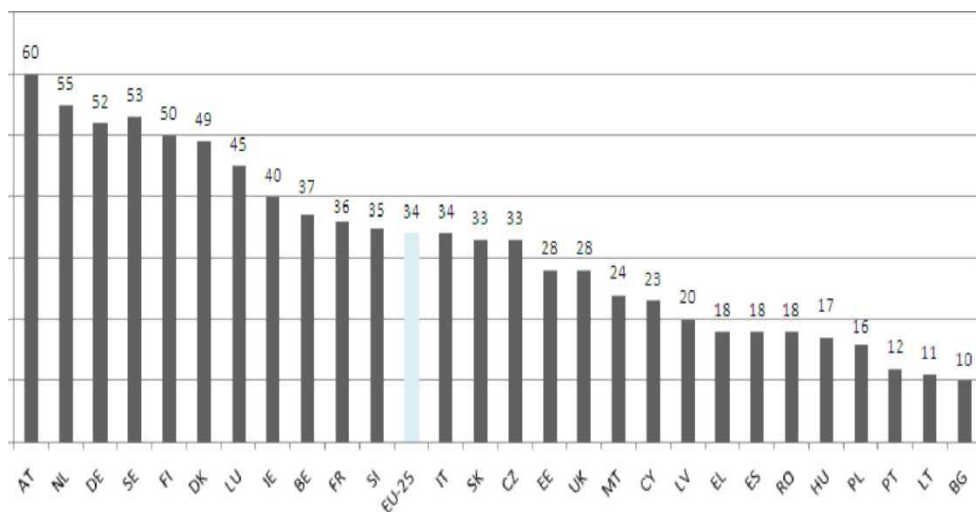
At the community level, the definition of volunteering actions is to be found in a set of regulating norms and documents. The core of these approaches is the idea that *volunteering activities represent a personal decision, as they are not being*

paid, or rewarded with other material benefits (idem: 44). An activity is considered as volunteering when it meets the following criteria: the individual does it by his/her own decision, he/she does not expect material benefits, the action is dedicated to a non-profit cause and it is mainly initiated by a nongovernmental organization, not driven by financial gains.

In Romania, the *Volunteering Law 339/2006* stipulates the following specifications: volunteering is a public interest action, done from personal decision, to the benefit of another person, without any material rewards; an activity is considered of public interest if it is developed in areas of concern like: social work and social services, protection of human rights, health, culture, arts, education, science, charity, religion, philanthropy, sports, environment protection, social, and community. When analyzing these boundaries, we notice the increasing significance of the active dimension, of involving the individual in both personal learning process and in social, community activities. The hereby study defines the active citizenship education in relation to the *knowledge acquiring process (cognitive-intellectual level), attitudes (affective and moral level), skills (psychomotor or action level), based on community values*. In terms of processes and dynamics, the work perspective is the evolution from “*learning to know*” to “*learning to act*”, forecasted by George Văideanu, in 1996.

The percentage of persons confirming their participation in volunteering activities within an organization is 18% in Romania, compared to the European average of 34% (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Participation rate in volunteering activities



Source: GHK Consulting on the basis of Eurobarometer survey data, 2009.

The European Commission document entitled *Study on Volunteering in the European Union* (2009) assesses the impact of economic crisis on volunteering activities, emphasizing several specific issues. In countries like Ireland and Netherlands, the economic crisis period facilitated the increase in number of the persons involved in such activities. According to the *Volunteer Centre in Ireland*, the recession increased the number of persons involved in volunteering actions. In 2009, the growth was of approx. 90%, compared to the numbers reported in 2008, while in Netherlands, the growth is 44%, on the same time scale. In the Eastern European countries (Romania included), it is considered that the present economic situation is a challenge to the volunteering sector, meaning that the number of applications for participation in volunteering actions has increased. There have been approached various scenarios considering the development of this field in the years to come. In some countries, the number of persons involved in volunteering actions is expected to grow (Belgium, Netherlands), while in other countries, the dramatically decreasing number of volunteers, due to the population aging, generates serious concerns (Italy).

Considering the age criterion, Romania has recorded an increased participation in volunteering actions of the young population aged between 15 and 30 years, but also of the elderly (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Trend of participation in volunteering actions in Europe, by age

Age trend	Country
Young people active in volunteering actions (15 - 30 years)	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain
Adults (30 – 50 years)	Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Portugal, Sweden
Increased participation in volunteering actions in all age groups	Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK
Increased participation of late adulthood population	Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden

Source: *Study on Volunteering in the European Union* (2009).

Romania has recorded significant correlations between the rate of participation in volunteering actions and the education level. Thus, the subjects with academic background are more willing to participate in volunteering actions.

Figure 4: Participation in volunteering actions, by education level.

Austria	Denmark	Romania
Non-academic: 45% University degree: 37% Vocational: 34% Vocational schools: 28% Secondary school: 28% Compulsory school: 19% <i>Source: BMSK, 2006</i>	Students: 34% Non-educated people: 25% Vocational education: 36% Short-term non-vocational education 36% Long term non-vocational education (i.e. university): 45% <i>Source: Boje, Fridberg & Ibsen, eds., 2006: 58</i>	PhD: 17% Academic studies: 27% High school: 9% Low education level: 7% <i>Source: Adapted from 2008 European Values Survey (Institute for the Research of Life Quality, 2009).1999-2004, p. 224</i>

Source: *Study on Volunteering in the European Union* (2009).

One of the relevant initiatives for the promotion of volunteering, as an activity enabling the experience acquiring and skills development, is the setting of certain time intervals, when the promotion campaigns are essential. Thus, *The International Volunteering Year* (event initiated by the European Commission in 2001) is the reference point in plan for making volunteering visible. In Romania, the context for running such activities is provided by the measures taken for a more flexible curricula, encouraging education programs focused on skills development, the approach of *inter pares* assessment methods, the use of education portfolios as means for assessing the learning progress, provisions included in the *National Education Law 1/2011*, together with the adoption of the *Volunteering Law, in 2001, amended in 2006*.

2. Approaches of active citizenship education and experiential learning

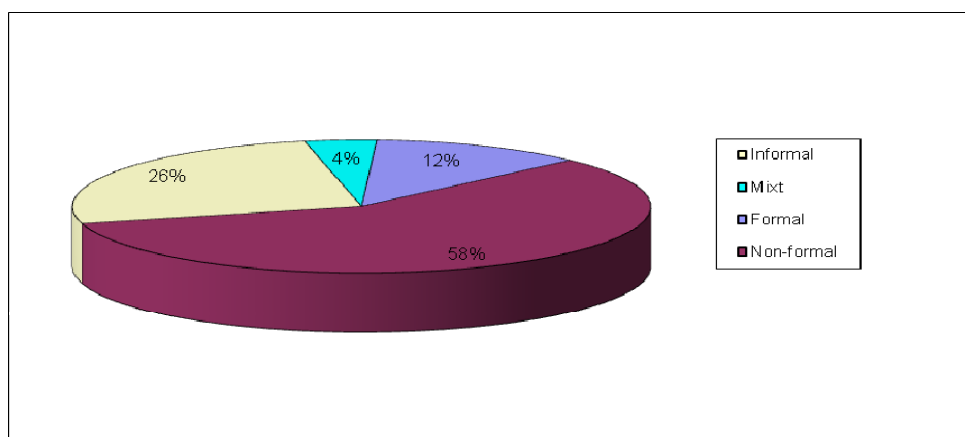
Starting from the variety of learning situations, the lifelong learning paradigm considers necessary to develop the educational processes in relation to the formal, non-formal or informal settings. Although the non-formal and informal education do not directly determine the award of any qualification, the European Union policies have specific provisions for the validation of the knowledge, skills and competences thus acquired, through identification, accreditation and certification of education results, regardless the time, place or way they have been achieved. The experience of the countries which already have in place complementary results measurement methodologies, such as the competences portfolios, individual plans, project based evaluations, should be studied and used as resource for the national programs. The evaluation process is not focused only on the information taught, but more on the attitudes and skills acquired during learning activities, while the

volunteering actions provide a real environment for application and enhancement. In this context, the issue of validating the skills acquired in volunteering actions becomes crucial in the promotion and multiplying such experiences.

The *Classification of Learning Activities* (EUROSTAT, 2006) defines the learning process as any activity of an individual with the purpose of improving his/her knowledge, developing his/her skills and competences. Three learning types are emphasized here, according to the specific context of the process: *formal learning*, provided by the accredited education suppliers, ended with the competences evaluation and certification stage; the *non-formal learning* includes the adult literacy programs, basic education for teenagers who abandoned school, life skills, general knowledge, as processes of variable time, that are not compulsory focused on a qualification; the *informal learning* is intentional, but less organized and structured, and it appears in distinct forms, from lessons at home, to those learned daily at work, by self determination.

The *Study on Active Citizenship Education* (General Directorate for Education and Culture, European Commission, 2007) states that more than half of the educational activities designed for active citizenship skills development take place in the non-formal context (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Learning types distribution



Source: General Directorate for Education and Culture, European Commission, 2007.

The belief that any genuine form of education is based on experience does not interfere with the fact that all experiences are authentically and equally educational. The experience is not similar to education, because some experiences are bad examples: “all experiences are wrong educational ways when they stop or affect the development of future experiences; then, the possibilities of extending the experience in the future are restricted” (Dewey, 1977: 180). The quality of an experience is perceived in relation to two dimensions: the actual activity, by

referring to the immediate aspect, either convenient or inconvenient, and its impact on the subsequent experiences. This involves the need to promote the type of experiences that generates desirable future experiences, because “no experience lives or dies by itself, the major issue of experience based education being the selection of present experiences that may creatively and richly coexist in the subsequent experiences” (Dewey, 1977: 182).

Carl Rogers, the father of client oriented therapy, promotes a new type of learning, *the experiential learning*. In addition to the cognitive learning, specific to the academic education, the experiential learning focuses on the needs and desires of the student. The model is developed by David Kolb (1984), based on the principle according to which learning is the knowledge building process by reshaping the experience. For Kolb, learning is not the acquisition or transmission of content, but the interaction between content and experience, where each pole affects the other. The experiential learning concept proposed by David Kolb places the problem solving model in the center of research studies. Kolb proposes a number of stages of the experiential learning: *actual experience (to do)* consisting in the full involvement in *here and now* experiences; *observation and reflection (to observe)*; *the development of abstract concepts and generalization (to think)* is based on the development of concepts that integrate observation into theories, logical structures; the *validation and testing of new concept in unusual situations (to plan)* involves the use of theories in making-decisions and solving problems. The model developed by Kolb proposes learning strategies specific to each component. The real experience is achieved through simulations, case studies, non-formal activities, demonstrations. The observation and reflection are done through activities conducted in small groups (*buzz groups*), discussions, guided observation. The abstract conceptualization is based on the content dissemination method, and the active experiments are performed during lab activities, internships at work, practice. The professional literature tends to use the experiential learning concept with antinomic meanings: on the one hand, this term describes an activity that generates favorable contexts for acquiring and direct application of knowledge and skills in real situations. This type of learning represents the grounds for institutional training programs for people working in social fields (teachers, social workers, public servants, etc.). The second type is the learning through real life experiences. In this case, the formal, organized aspect disappears, and the students themselves become the projectors and organizers of the entire process. It is about the learning from daily reflections and experiences. The experiential learning achieved through volunteering actions gives the individuals the opportunity to acquire experiences that may be reproduced in professional contexts. On the other hand, beside the social and professional insertion, the volunteering activities trigger the active participation of individuals in the community development, thus being a distinct educational dimension for democratic citizenship.

3. Approaches of education for democratic citizenship and multiculturalism

Study on Active Citizenship Education, conducted by the General Directorate for Education and Culture, European Commission in 2007, reveals that multiculturalism is one of the main themes of the active citizenship education.

Figure 6: Thematic priorities in active citizenship education

Topics	Total	%
Human rights	9	16%
Child rights	7	12%
Civil rights	10	18%
Democratic participation	36	63%
Multiculturalism	22	39%
Social insertion / cohesion	26	46%

Source: *Study on Active Citizenship Education* (General Directorate for Education and Culture, European Commission, 2007).

According to the *Recommendation of the European Parliament, 2008*, the development of axiological, valuing and intercultural competences is one of the targets of nowadays education. The capacity to establish relations, communicate in various contexts are cross-competences approached more and more explicitly by the education. The return to the roots enables the completion of the identity definition stage. Lee Rainwater (1990) proposes the *valid identity* concept, located between *who you are and what you feel you are*, *who you are and what you show to the others*, being defined by four combined elements: how we see ourselves; how we behave, since this is how the others know us; how the others see us; how the others treat us. The access to alterity is not possible without completing the identity knowledge stage. Therefore, the settlement of the differences between global and local becomes possible because “people have to become citizens without losing their roots” (Delors, 2000, p. 11). *Learning how to live together* is one of the educational pillars, stated by the European Commission (2000). Understanding *the other*, the acceptance of differences becomes a specific form of self knowledge. “Any form of identity is complex, because individuals define themselves in relation with other people”, stated Jacques Delors, in 2000. The relation with *the others* involves the embracement of a responsible conduct. The first thing to do for “restating education as a core force among the others in the society should be the preservation of its melting pot function, by fighting any type of exclusion”. (Delors, 2000: p. 43).

The CEDEFOP studies (2008) prove that under qualified persons are seven time less likely to participate in a lifelong learning program than those with a higher education level. This fact generates inequities in education: the individuals

with the highest education level are more likely to continue their studies, while the persons with low education level face difficulties when attending a training program (*Matthew Effect*) (OECD, 2003). This is one of the reasons for which the “educational systems have the obligation to become more open and relevant, specifically because it is estimated that by 2020, the gap between the competence level the job requirements will deepen” (Communication of the European Commission, 2009, p. 15). In 1999, Micheline Rey stated that: “the formation of social and socio-cognitive representations of the trainee depends on the contacts established between cultures, or distant cultural groups”. In the context of the economic changes over the last years, we notice the societies’ tendency to become more restrictive, in order to maintain the monopoly on resources, fact that contributes to the occurrence of social exclusion and alienation.

On the other hand, recent studies (Ballard and Clanchy, 1997; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Jones, 1999) certify that the individuals themselves, by their cultural origins, chose to have an active/inactive conduct when initiating an intercultural dialog. Thus, the studies performed by Jones (1999) prove that the students belonging to cultural environments where the teacher-student dialog is not encouraged will consider the open styles, based on interaction, as disturbing and capable to negatively affect the cognitive balance. Moreover, Wong (2004) establishes correlations between the teaching style of teachers and the students’ approach of learning. Wong states that academic goals of the societies who do not encourage dialog focus on evaluation, results, products, and exam promotion. Therefore, processes like memory, attention are being promoted in detriment of creativity, critical thinking. These realities generate social phenomena based on exclusion / self exclusion, alienation / self alienation, that should be responsibly managed by the educational systems.

4. Conclusions

In contemporary societies, the concept of education for active citizenship and the approaches to citizenship are different and vary, from a region to another. Processes like developing a common identity and shared culture, creation of knowledge, learning through common experiences are achieved through active participation and commitment. But having the right to participate in social life is not equivalent to doing so in practice, nor indeed being equipped to do so on equal terms. Is why the educational systems are responsible for creating interactive opportunities for knowledge. In this respect, understanding the relationship between the education for active citizenship and volunteering and the experiential learning, the education for active citizenship and volunteering and the intercultural learning represents a milestone for the implementation of the new paradigm in education.

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