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Lifelong Learning in Romania

Lifelong learning is in Romania, on my opinion, more a nice and rather empty expression, than a reality. Despite some statements in official documents, there is no coherent public policy framework for the promotion of lifelong learning. The adoption of the concept was mainly connected with EU trends but was not followed by appropriate action. If early childhood education, school education, higher education and vocational education enjoy particular attention and support, the other areas of lifelong learning are largely ignored.

However, Romania has a valuable tradition of lifelong learning practices: during the 1920s and 1930s an interesting model of “social pedagogy” has been developed, targeting various categories of learners, including inhabitants of rural areas, members of disadvantaged communities, but also women and young people. Very little remains nowadays from this tradition, as well as from the system that was functioning during the years of the communist regime.

Apart from the offer of the education system and of the providers of vocational training, opportunities for learning are provided mainly by private, non-governmental structures, either for profit, still in an emerging stage, or not-for-profit, most often dependent on project-based funding and not able to ensure continuity and effective impact.

It is interesting to note that two of the most significant developments in the area of lifelong learning are connected with cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. The first, concerns the programmes targeting disadvantaged Roma communities, with a variety of educational activities, from those aiming at attracting children to school, to educational activities for Roma parents or adult education projects aiming at facilitating social inclusion and access to labour market. The second one, targets adult immigrants: in order to fulfil EU requirements, Romanian authorities had to adapt legislation in order to provide free of charge Romanian language courses and cultural orientation to all foreign citizens with legal residence. While the law was amended a few years ago, only from this year it will be really enforced, in combined action of educational authorities, authorities in charge with the management of migration and NGOs.

Lifelong learning is likely to get soon new meanings in Romania, due to the recent opening of access to EU structural funds. But only time will tell if this will mean a coherent and meaningful approach, aiming at providing appropriate learning opportunities for all, or just another missed chance, with scattered or overlapping initiatives that will cease once the funding is stopped.

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