

Innovative Educational Mechanisms for the Development of the Business Environment in the Danube Region

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Abstract: The Danube Region, as represented in the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, represents a complex mechanism of social coexistence, development and economic progress. The integrated functioning of this region is a desideratum, which, in order to be achieved, requires permanent adaptation and innovation on all its structural levels. The development capacity of a region or community is based, more than anything else, on the educational resource constituted for the sustainable and progressive capacity of the available workforce at predetermined time intervals. In the content of this article we aim to highlight the importance and necessity of using new educational approaches regarding the preparation of generations that, at the end of certain learning cycles, become a resource for the economy of the respective regions. The basic idea is represented by the interconnection between the real economy and the theoretical knowledge, by developing an educational mechanism of simulated participation within the real economic gear. The novelty of this mechanism is represented by the significant diminution of the gap between the development of a real economic process and the purely theoretical approach, an approach with which most of the human resource enters the real economy.

Keywords: European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, real economy, simulated participation, the Danube.

Introduction

The Danube region comprises 14 countries, out of which nine are EU member states. In this area live more than 100 million people, accounting for one fifth of the European Union population. Although the countries are shifted back in terms of economic power, the region is strongly interconnected and continues to have high potential for integration and growth. It has a strategic position, ensuring the openness of the European Union to its neighbors, the Black Sea region, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. In the region we find the most international river in the world,

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which represents a major transport axis, an interconnected hydrological basin of vital importance and a world-renowned ecological corridor.

In the context of these composite elements, the region is connected both through opportunities and challenges, the policies of the countries being interdependent, but all of them have much to gain from increasing cooperation capacity, for example, in terms of completing transport connections that are missing, less dependence on energy providers from outside the region and addressing demographic changes or migration of values. The region's competitiveness can also substantially benefit from joint actions in the field of Small and Medium Enterprises, labor market, education and security policies. All these development sectors are supported, in the long term, by a labor force well-anchored in the economic realities and, obviously, adapted to the dynamics of economic flow increasingly versatile and technologically complex. The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, a well-founded programmatic framework, is an extremely important factor in implementing viable measures, with profound effects, in shaping a long-term sustainable economic and social development.

Priority area 9, which manages the pillar for research, education and competitiveness, is the main tool for working on innovative mechanisms to achieve the proposed goal. The fact that these programmatic approaches have shown their effectiveness is also an important point of reference in the approaches to new models and actions of interconnection between market economy theory and practice. Most of the times, the dysfunctions registered by the labour market have their origin in the increasing imbalance between the training of graduates from different educational cycles and the reality of running a company, regardless of the structural dimension of the company. Thus, in an upward trend, companies try different partnerships with the educational units through which they form a part of the necessary human resource in the production or administration area. However, the tested methods, lacking the time needed for validation in the real economy, are not a guarantee of a sustainable success that can be implemented in the medium and long term, which periodically makes these companies be in a phase of search and testing of new viable methods, a situation which, most of the times, merely maintains the same factual situation, respectively the insufficient preparation of graduates for the real economy.

Content

In Romania, the most complex area of the Danube region is the South East Macroeconomic Region, this complexity coming from the fact that it is part of the Black Sea synergy. The most developed urban areas are Constanța, Galați and Brăila, and the fact that it represents the eastern border of the European Union makes this area one of special importance.

The economic growth and development of this area is and will be permanently linked to the native human resource, but also to the strategies approached by the economic environment for the exploitation of this resource. The identification of innovative educational methods and tools, in terms of empowering the young human resource in the real economy, must be a decision based on action policies and concrete measures of implementation, implementing them requiring interactive cooperation between the trainer and the beneficiary. As evidenced by various analyses, the Danube strategy must considerably increase the part of applied policies, thus coming out of the more theoretic sphere which it is promoting at the moment. The synergistic interconnection between the Danube, the Black Sea (geographically) and the European Union (institutional) represents the key element for achieving a sustainable economic ecosystem. The project is committed both through regional convergence and through the training of Union type resources: procedural, legislative, relational and financial, but also through the complementarity with other mechanisms and cooperation projects such as the Three Seas Initiative - supported by Trump Administration and the Eastern Partnership.¹

At this moment, the preparation of the labour force for the real economy, in applied regime, is configured on the method of dual vocational education. This educational form has its advantages but also its disadvantages, as the sphere of action is quite clearly segmented among the school population, specifically, the vast majority of the direct beneficiaries on this form of training are the young people who graduated high school cycle and who are focused on the production labour sector with a great need for immediate absorption in the labour market. The forms of vocational education existing at this time are addressed to different groups. Specifically, two-year vocational education is addressed to 9th-grade graduates, the three-year vocational education is addressed to 8th-grade graduates, while dual education is organized for graduates of compulsory education, therefore for the 10th-grade graduates.

¹<http://www.contributors.ro/global-europa>

Therefore, this last form of vocational education is addressed to the students who completed compulsory education, in order to obtain the competences necessary for entering the labour market, thus offering them an alternative training path. In a way, it resembles the post-secondary schools that train professionals, especially for the labour market, only that, instead of a 12 grades-graduation diploma, they must prove that the 10 compulsory grades have been completed.¹ Under these conditions, the small segment of beneficiaries in education does not represent a sufficient and sustainable indicator for regional macroeconomic development, as there should be a solid and diverse long-term development. Even though, the concept of participation and preparation on the model of the simulated enterprises is a new one and reduced as level of implementation in the market, only the years 2011-2013 noting by substantial quantitative approaches, we appreciate that it can become an innovative training tool by the fact that it can cover a very large segment of beneficiaries, from high school cycle to university cycle and it can also function in an integrated system with the dual learning form.

An essential, fundamental aspect, which differentiates the dual education from the method of training through a simulated system, is given by the direct connection between the economic agent and the resource under training, the dual education system being unable to operate without the economic agent. From this perspective, the simulated education system is not conditioned by any direct connection with the economic agent, a private economic agent or with a majority state shareholding, which can be an integral part of the learning system for several educational units without any structural or reception dysfunction of the trained person. The overall effect is thought at the macroeconomic level and has as main determinant the creation of a contingent of human resource that, from an operational point of view, can be both employee and employer. The simulated learning system is a complex system, with a real mechanism of connection to the real economic market, but at the same time a system highly adaptable to changes in dynamics and economic profile.

The simulated enterprise ensures a much easier and more useful learning, development and deepening of the economic and legal knowledge and social skills required by the graduates (of the bachelor's or master's degree studies) by a real firm, contributing to the formation of skills, habits and competences. which can be applied in all economic fields and in all positions of the organizational structures within a legal entity. The simulated enterprise, from a conceptual point of view, is an interactive learning method that aims at developing the entrepreneurial spirit, by

¹ <https://adevarul.ro/educatie/scoala>

integration and interdisciplinary application of knowledge, ensuring conditions for the practical deepening of the competences acquired by students / master students in vocational training.¹

In this process of congruence and economic development, in the Danube region, we consider that it is necessary to accentuate the educational measures of innovative type, inserted in different educational cycles, these having a profitable contribution to any community and, also, being easy to multiply in any country benefiting from the strategy for the Danube Region. Under these conditions, the axis of socio-economic development of the Danube may represent the propitious environment for the realization of educational forms that act in a multidisciplinary way and in the long term, an absolutely necessary aspect for an increased interaction of the population in the riparian areas.

The European Commission provides long-term financial support for the development of entrepreneurship training. In its Communication of 2012, *Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socio-Economic Outcomes*, the emphasis is placed on transversal competences and, in particular, on entrepreneurial competences, recommending that:

'Member States should encourage entrepreneurial skills through new and creative ways of teaching and learning starting from primary school and from secondary to higher education should focus on the possibility of setting up a business as a future career. The experience in real life, through problem-based learning and business relations, should be integrated in all disciplines and adapted to all levels of education. All young people should benefit from at least a practical entrepreneurial experience before the end of the compulsory education cycle.'²

The operation, in Romania, of the simulated enterprises/ exercise companies is ensured by the Headquarters of the Exercise Firm Network and at European level there is EUROPEN (European Practice Entreprises Network). Besides, EUROPEN-PEN International operates on the worldwide network, being present in over 42 countries. These platforms ensure coordination and monitoring of this form of training, but with limited operational capacity.

¹ <https://www.ishoreca.ro/>

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Rethinking education: investing in skills for better socio-economic performance, COM/2012/0669 final

Acting according to this principle, in the Danube region, both in Romania and in the other countries, the development and functioning of this learning mechanism can be successfully used in the area of providing cultural, tourism and leisure services, segments that represent a catalyst for social and economic diffusion and, at the same time, key factors for sustainable economic development. A strategy that emphasizes the development of economic thinking in micro-communities is a factor generating productivity and economic intelligence, and the local economic initiative guarantees considerable risk reductions. Thus, with a ready human resource and an alternative system of microcommunity economic development, sustainable macroeconomic tendencies are structured in the Danube riparian regions.

The discovery and capitalization of economic resources, in communities with low economic development indicator, is a necessary tool, at least for the developing countries in the Danube region, in that the short-term economic utility is the best engine of growth and development in the long term. The reduction of economic disparities from micro to macro, in this context of the Danube regions, represents the mechanism with the highest immersion in the market economy.

Conclusions

Innovation and adaptation to the current socio-economic realities is the propitious mechanism for progress in any community, but especially in a national and international region that is fundamentally linked through a whole set of natural, cultural and economic elements. The Danube region, through the Danube river, is the most internationalized area across Europe, a fact that must be considered as an additional economic potential, a basin of development and well-being for the entire riparian population.

The use of the concept of simulated enterprise, as described in the content of this article, is an innovative method, with proven results in the real economy and which can be successfully used in a long-term development strategy of the Danube region. The use of this method, implicitly its correlation with economic intelligence, projects a framework of sustainable economic and social development along the whole Danube axis. For the next financial framework of the European Union, 2021-2027, the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region should integrate and provide for a more consistent allocation of resources for the materialization of innovation in the formation of the human resource and the economic-social communities.

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