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Adult Education in the Context of the Communist Education Reform in Romania: Policies, Institutions and Publications (1945-1955)

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Abstract

This paper proposes a systematic analysis of adult education in the context of the political changes in post-World War II Romania. The analysis of legislative documents allows us to identify four major directions of adult education in the first decade of communism in Romania: the formation of a new political and cultural elite, ideological indoctrination of teachers, literacy campaign aimed at the adult population and the cultural enlightenment of the masses. These become major policies of the communist regime. Their achievement requires a favorable institutional context, in which old cultural and educational institutions disappear or are radically transformed, and new ones appear, in line with the political interests of the regime. Our study reflects the dynamics of institutions and pedagogical publications for adult education in the sovietisation of culture and education in Romania, between 1945 and 1955.

Keywords: adult education; communist reform of education; adult literacy campaign; cultural enlightenment of masses.

1. Introduction

Immediately after its establishment, the communist regime in Romania initiates an ample campaign to liquidate illiteracy, which is part of an important project of ideological transformation of the society, with profound

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implications in the field of educational policies and practices. The liquidation of illiteracy and democratization of culture become the dominants of a policy that creates a mythical image of education in the communist society (Friedrich, Brzezinski, 1969, p. 154). In the autumn of 1944, the communist press estimates 49% of illiterate people in rural areas. Communist leaders tendentiously present the case of illiteracy, denying prewar and interwar government efforts in this direction (Tismăneanu et al, 2006, p. 478). In fact, there are constant and significant concerns to increase the literacy and the cultural levels of the adult population in Romania of the first half of the twentieth century. The most significant landmarks and directions regarding adult education in this period are: Spiru Haret's work to organize the first schools for adults and involvement of teachers in the cultural enlightenment of rural population; Dimitrie Gusti’s work in the monographic research of the Romanian villages; the establishment of community cultural centers in villages and of schools for the villagers and leaders of community cultural centres, through the Social Service Act, in 1938; knowledge accessibility campaigns in rural areas, coordinated by Virgil Bârbat.

2. Policies regarding adult education in the context of the communist education reform legislation

The Decree-Law from 3 August 1948 clearly states, in only 39 articles, the ideological role of school and education. The education system is organized exclusively by the state and "founded on democratic, popular and realistically-scientific ideas" (Article 1). The second article allows the identification of the main directions in adult education: liquidation of illiteracy; youth education in the spirit of popular democracy and the increase of the cultural level of the people; the training of teachers, researchers and specialists in all areas in accordance with the needs of the popular democracy and socialist society. Article 25 provides for the liquidation of illiteracy through 1-2 years’ literacy courses for people aged 14-55. According to the law, there are four fundamental directions in adult education, which we will make reference to hereafter: the rapid formation of a new political and cultural elite; the ideological training of teachers; adult literacy campaign; the democratization of culture and the cultural enlightenment of the masses.

2.1. The rapid formation of a new political and cultural elite

The democratization of education, the stated purpose of the education reform of 1948, is subject to the ideal of the socialist transformation of the country through the creation of a new elite, which begins with the elimination of “reactionary” teachers and students (Fischer-Galati, 1998; Scurtu, 1999; Frangopol, 2000; Ghiurescu, 2001). On the one hand, the law creates the possibility of obtaining a degree in a very short time, on the other hand, it outlines the context for the abolition of the old elite through the "purification" and "rationalization" of higher education (Article 33 of the Decree-Law from 3 August 1948). Literacy training and validation systems provided by the law allow some individuals with little education to be awarded a university degree upon completion of studies lasting only a few years. According to Article 31, for "the urgent needs of the economic and social life of the country, there can be established educational programmes of a shorter duration than that provided in the present law, in circumstances which will be described by special laws". Some beneficiaries of the new educational programmes become high officials with important positions in the new regime.

2.2. The ideological training of teachers

Under the law, professors are required to attend debate-meetings, to listen to speeches of officials from the Higher Education Commission subordinated to the Regional Communist Party Organization, to study the political party press etc. The 1948-1949 academic year begins under the provisions of the new law, and every faculty, even every professor, is directly responsible for the implementation of the ideology of the reform: the dialectical and historical materialism. In August 1951, the government adopted a decision requiring continuing ideological, political and professional training for teachers. Teacher training involves a compulsory ideologically-political component, most teacher training institutions being created mainly for ideological indoctrination (Momanu, 2005).
2.3. Adult literacy campaign

The national campaign to liquidate illiteracy is initiated in the winter of 1945, provided the phenomenon is really worrying. It aims to educate the active illiterate population aged 14-55, and is declared completed in 1956. Like in the USSR, the campaign is predominantly political, benefiting from older but unrecognized local traditions with respect to adult education. Initially, courses are addressed to villagers, but shortly they spread to urban areas. The curse duration is one to two years and the diploma is equivalent to the diploma awarded upon completion of primary education.

2.4. The democratization of culture and the cultural enlightenment of the masses

Culture plays an important role in the governance process, becoming an instrument of propaganda. The cultural enlightenment of the masses serves the ideological indoctrination ideal and restricts, in fact, intellectual and spiritual freedom of expression (Momanu, 2005). The democratization of culture means that masses can only access sources of proletarian culture, drastically limited by the absolute monopoly of the party of all sources of information and opinion and also by a very strict censorship (Pipes, 1998). Censorship and the total isolation from the culture of the Western world is the dominant context in which Romanian culture is struggling to survive in the '50s. The most important step in ending the relations with the culture of the Western world was the termination, in 1948, of the 1939 cultural agreement between Romania and France. Cultural import is censored more drastically than that of tangible goods, and reading a Western magazine can be considered a crime against the state security and punished with a long jail sentence (Nițescu, 1995, p. 64).

3. Institutions of adult education during the communist education reform in Romania

In order to be achieved, the communist reform requires a favorable institutional context. Old institutions of culture and education suffer radical changes or are dissolved. A relevant example is that of the Romanian Academy, suppressed in June 1948, and replaced with Academy of the Popular Republic of Romania, by Decree no. 76, published in Official Gazette no. 132 bis of 9 June 1948. For political incompatibility reasons, the Society for the Education of the Romanian People, which had been operating since 1866 and was meant for adult education through general and professional knowledge courses and training, is dissolved in 1948; the activity of this institution was resumed in 1992 (Neculău, 2004, p. 76). The Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture is founded in 1949 and is coordinated by the Department of Propaganda of the Communist Party, which coordinates and oversees the network of houses of culture (in urban areas) and community cultural centres (in rural areas) developed in the '50s across the country. The community cultural centres, established by the Social Service Act in 1938, are taken over and used for the literacy campaign and ideological propaganda (Mihalache, 2011, p. 128; Preutu, 2013, p. 114).

In the context of the communist education reform, new institutions appear, which, following a prolonged literacy campaign process, contribute to the formation of a new political and intellectual elite. As part of the reform, separate two-year special schools are established in Bucharest, Cluj and Iasi, for workers aged 23-40, pulled out from production (Giurescu, 2001). To enroll for these schools, one has to successfully complete 7 years of education, but, as an exemption, a completion of 5 or even 4 years is enough. The vocational high school graduates can enroll for university without having to pass an entrance examination. Decree no. 343/1953 changes the already established special schools into faculties for workers. Petre Frangopol (2000) indicates the presence in universities of people who are not even high school graduates, having primary education only. Vocational schools for workers are established in factories, institutions and ministries, with the duration of two to three years for students who remained in production, and three to six months for those outside the production process. Evening classes are organized for high school students, starting with the 1948/1949 school year, and for 5th – 7th grade students, starting with the 1952/1953 school year (Tismăneanu et al, 2006, p. 473). By the Decision of the Ministry of Public Education, from 29 October 1948, one-year-long law schools are established for workers pulled out of production. After a year of study, students receive a diploma that gave them the right to work in any law-related job, including that of a
magnistrate and a prosecutor (Someșan, Iosifescu, 1998; Tismăneanu et al, 2006). Communist Party schools are established with the explicit role to form the new political ruling class. These are organized on two levels: higher education, subordinated to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and secondary education, subordinated to local party organizations. The Communist Party’s Workers University is established in March 1945, which is the future Ștefan Gheorghiu Academy, which prepares the ruling class for social, political, economic and administrative activities involving the Communist Party. The Andrei Idanov School of Social Sciences, established in 1948, aims to train future propagandists (Drăgușin, 2009). The two schools, Andrei Idanov and Ștefan Gheorghiu merged in the late 1950s, Ștefan Gheorghiu remaining the main school for the personnel of the Communist Party until December 1989 (Tismăneanu et al, 2006, p.51). Under the sign of the democratization of culture and education, important institutions of higher education are established and the number of students increases. In 1948, the Theatre and Film Institute, the Institute of Physical Culture and Sport of Bucharest and the Medical and Pharmaceutical Institute of Tîrgu Mureș, the last one using Hungarian as a medium of instruction, are established; the Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj is established in 1949 and, in 1950, the Institute of Theatre in Tîrgu Mureș, using Hungarian as a medium of instruction. New polytechnic institutes are established in Cluj, Brașov and Galati, and also new faculties: electronics, automation, agronomy etc. (Stanciu, 1971, pp. 348-349).

Since the education reform new textbooks and new pedagogical literature, the Institute of Pedagogical Sciences and at the State Didactical and Pedagogical Publishing House are founded. The Pedagogical Journal, the main publication of the Institute, is first issued in 1952. In April 1952, a congress on education takes place where the most discussed issues were the educational work in schools, the literacy campaign, the cultural enlightenment of the masses and the politically-ideological training of teachers.

4. Adult education in pedagogical publications during the sovietisation of education in Romania

From a publishing perspective, the adult literacy campaign is supported by textbooks especially designed for that purpose. Abecedarul experimental pentru adulții (The Experimental ABC for Adults) (Teodorescu, 1946) and Abecedarul adultului (The ABC for Adults) (Berca, 1946) are the first books of the period intended for adult literacy. The learning method is intuitive and based on images and short texts depicting everyday activities (agricultural, technical, domestic etc.). Starting 1948, the Ministry of Public Education publishes new textbooks for adult literacy and cultural enlightenment of the masses campaigns, much more impregnated with the ideological spirit of that era: Să învățăm carte (Let us learn) (1948), Istoria patriei, geografia și științele naturii. Manual unic pentru adulți (History, Geography and Science. Comprehensive Textbook for Adult Education) (1950), Limba română (The Romanian Language) (1951), Aritmetica pentru adulți (Arithmetic for Adult Education) (1951), Abecedar pentru adulți (ABC for Adult Education) (1953). Over 590 new textbooks were written and printed between the years 1948 and 1951, in circulations adding up to nearly 28 million copies (Tismăneanu et al, 2006, p. 488).

Most of the new instruments of propaganda are copied from the Soviets and aim at initiating the adult population in the Soviet culture. Works such as Ideile lui Lenin luminează calea spre comunism. În școlile de adulți (Lenin’s Ideas Illuminate the Path to Communism. For Adult Education Schools) (Sepilov, 1955), Patriotismul sovietic, forța puternică în lupta pentru comunism (Soviet Patriotism, the Strong Force in the Fight for Communism) (Belov, 1952) or Învățătura tovarășului Stalin despre condițiile preliminare principale ale trecerii de la socialism la comunism (The Teachings of Comrade Stalin on the Main Preliminary Conditions of the Transition from Socialism to Communism) (Chivu, 1953) set adult education on the path to shaping consciences to fit the ideological profile of the New Man. The youth study using vague didactical-looking propaganda materials, while new communist writings are published and new authors become recognized.

Teacher training is based on Soviet textbooks translated into Romanian. There are two main textbooks used to study pedagogy in higher education: the one coordinated by Kairov (published in 1948 and translated in 1949 by the State Publishing House) and that of Ogorodnikov and Șimbirov (published in 1952 by the Didactic and Pedagogical State Publishing House). The textbook coordinated by Kairov is intended for pedagogical institutes and universities, and is written in accordance with the curriculum approved by the USSR Ministry of Higher Education. The textbook coordinated by Șimbirov and Ogorodnikov mainly addresses the two-year pedagogical institutes, for training middle school teachers (see Momanu, 2005, pp. 138-145).

A significant aspect of the political intrusion in the cultural enlightenment of the masses is the introduction of
drastic censorship, compliant with the interests of the communist regime. The first list of banned publications was published in the Official Gazette as early as March 1945; in 1946, the list contained 156 pages (2000 titles), and in 1948, 522 pages. The number of banned books was, in fact, higher than stated in the volume (Bădescu, 2000, p. 12). The General Directorate for Press and Printings is established in 1949, the body responsible for censorship and control. The directorate authorizes the printing and distribution of books and art objects, regulates the rules of operation for libraries, bookstores and antique shops, gives instructions on organizing censorship offices in the capital and the rest of the country and on the conditions under which the newspapers and manuscripts are labelled as given "good to print" or "censored" (Tismâneanu et al, 2006, p. 493).

5. Conclusions

The communist authorities created the image of a permanent cultural revolution, whose main objectives were the liquidation of illiteracy and the democratization of culture. To achieve these objectives a hasted establishment of a new political and cultural elite was required, as well as an ideological training of teachers, who were directly involved in the process of shaping the New Man. These are the fundamental directions of adult education, outlined by the legislative context since the earliest times of the communist regime in Romania. The implementation of these directives requires the creation of a new institutional context, through the abolition or radical transformation of old institutions of culture and education, and the establishment of new ones, compliant with the interests of the political regime. Teacher training has an explicit ideological component, and the pedagogical instruction is conducted with the help of Soviet textbooks translated into Romanian. The adult literacy campaign and the cultural enlightenment of the masses are strongly supported by institutions and book publishers controlled by the new regime. Illiteracy, as a mass phenomenon, was significantly reduced after the reform of 1948 and the literacy campaign was declared a success. Official optimistic statistics aside, the literacy campaign of that period, heavily influenced by the new ideology, leaves room for analyses of the quality of the process and its real effectiveness, especially in rural and deprived areas. By using education for political indoctrination, the communist government created, in fact, a new form of illiteracy, effectively disguised into an attempt to remove illiteracy. The democratization of culture and the cultural enlightenment of the masses are achieved during a period of radical political censorship and ideological indoctrination, and became important levers for the indoctrination of the whole society.

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