

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ADULT EDUCATION IN ROMANIA. A LITERATURE REVIEW

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*Abstract:*The social dimension of adult education is predominantly identified in the literature of the beginning of the XXth Century. The promotion of national identity, the main educational goal of the XIXth Century, is now replaced by social emancipation, by means of ample actions of mass education, in the view of diminishing the social disparity. This principle is respected in the laws of education promoted by Spiru Haret (the Law of Secondary and Higher Education, 1896; the Law of Vocational Education, 1898), or Dimitrie Gusti (The Social Service Law, 1939), Romanian personalities who took extensive actions of adult education during the first half of the 20th Century. This article is based on the review of the literature on adult education written between 1900 and 1948, with the purpose to identify aspects of teachers' pedagogies and practices in relation to adult education and to review trends in the ways in which adult education is understood and conceptualize in the Romanian writings.

Keywords: adult education, social dimension, literature review.

1. Introduction

In the first half of the 20th century, the Romanian cultural area is marked by a process of multiplication of adult education approaches, as a direct result of the ample social movements in Denmark that echoed deeply in other European countries. These movements were aimed at generalizing adult education through the popular universities founded by the Danish pedagogue N. F. S. Grundtvig. According to the legislation regarding the school system reform proposed by Spiru Haret, the teaching staff, mainly made of primary school teachers, were granted scholarships from the state budget to study in Denmark. The declared aim of these legal provisions was to transpose the Danish literacy model to the Romanian cultural sphere, especially in the rural area.

The first decades of the 20th century record another particularity of the Romanian education system. Instead of the classical ideal, centered on the formation of moral individuality, a new ideal gains ground, related to the formation of social and cultural individuality. Ștefan Bârsănescu (1976, p. 48) depicts this change of perspective in the following words:

If during the 19th century the society required the educational system to train individuals that were capable to lead *de sine*, through a moral culture, at the beginning of the 20th century the same society regarded educators as being responsible with the raise of individuals not only towards a moral culture, but towards all cultural values and the ultimate height of culture itself, towards universality.

Spiru Haret's activity related to the reformation of the Romanian education system and the organization of the first schools for adults, along with the extended monographic research on Romanian villages initiated by Dimitrie Gusti who coordinated the students teams belonging to the "Prince Carol" Royal Foundation or the scientific knowledge affordability campaigns coordinated in the rural area by Virgil Bărbat, are among the most valuable initiatives related to adult education in the first half of the 20th century.

2. Adult education and "the increase of the social welfare of communities". Spiru Haret's contributions

Spiru Haret, minister of public education for three mandates, March 1897 - April 1899; February 1901 - December 1904; March 1907 - December 1910, organizes the Romanian education system setting the basis of an ample cultural trend, the *haretism*¹. In his first mandate as Minister, beginning on the 31st of March 1897, Haret passed two fundamental laws in Parliament: The Law of Secondary and Higher Education, 1898, and the Law of Vocational Education, 1899. During the same period, the Curriculum for Secondary Schools was adopted, alongside the regulations for all the level of education system; schools for adults, nursery schools were established, the Albina Journal was founded, the medal *Reward for Labour in Primary Education* was instituted (Schifirneț, 2014, p. 314). During his second mandate (1901-1904), the extra-school activity of primary-school teachers in the rural area is gradually extended. Establishing that "the fundamental principle of any law should be the tendency to achieve the highest level of *social welfare* for the members of the society", Haret (1969, p. 137) reorganizes rural schools by involving teachers in various activities aimed at the culturalization of adult population in the rural area. In Haret's view, *social welfare* resides in the conservation and increase of the economic, intellectual and moral wealth, its aim being "the positive increase of an individual's social coordinates" (*Idem*). This perspective is described in detail in *Chestiunea țărănească (The Rural Issue)* (1905), a work in which Haret insists on the teacher's role in the alphabetization of masses, considering that the overall rate of illiteracy at the time was over 75% of the total population (Haret, 1905, p. 74). Rightfully remarking that the reformation of education cannot be complete "without taking care of the moral and intellectual dimension of the rural population", Haret initiates the organization of courses for adults in cultural reunions that became exclusively the responsibility of primary-school teachers (*Ibidem*, p. 75).

În 1904, The Ministry of Public Education elaborated the first *Regulations for Adult Schools* which stipulated that *evening sittings* were the main location for free courses held in adult schools (Itu, p. 232). According to Haret's school system, *literary evening sittings* were part of adult schools, aiming, on the one hand, at the alphabetization of the rural population and on the other hand at the organization of practical activities related to the economic area and spare time scheduling. A year later, speaking of the part primary-school teachers played in *the action of educating adult population in the rural area*, Haret (1905, pp. 71-72) stated the following:

The cultural and economic campaign I conducted with the help of primary-school teachers and its successful outcomes proved that they are an extremely valuable resource as long as they are used for their true potential. Realizing their value and potential, I have strived to raise the villagers' awareness of their prestige and position them among the most important people of the community.

¹ The *haretism* aims at "introducing the cultural and economic factor to the masses in the rural area, through the primary school teachers" - Spiru Haret (1905), *Chestia țărănească [The Rural Issue]*, Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Gobl, București, p. 10.

The Law of vocational education, promoted by Spiru Haret in 1899, and amended during his three mandates by various orders, decisions and regulations, aimed at training adults to support the creation of Romanian industry. In Haret's view, besides its role of "source of qualified professionals and stimulation for the industrial field", practical vocational training also had "an economic and social purpose" (*Ibidem*, p. 75). The Law passed in 1899 increased the number of elementary artisan's schools in the rural area, while sub-dividing professional education in four categories: agricultural, forestry, trade and commercial. Within the same legislative context Haret restructures normal schools by introducing practical agricultural works in the structure of the curriculum, stating that "the teacher must be a villager himself/herself and must thus treasure the love for the land and the ability to work it" (*Ibidem*). Spiru Haret provides the means for school teachers to "build a material and moral situation" after graduating their studies, by setting up Credit, economic and assistance unions of teaching staff and offering subsidies for the foundation of adult schools and school gardens.

Another major contribution of Haret's Law was related to the holiday trips organized for teachers so that they could "know their country and speak to the villagers about it". Teachers and headmasters performed training and study visits mainly to Denmark and Germany in order to understand the specificity of *superior rural schools* and be able to adapt this model to the Romanian system. On the 24th of January 1908, Haret addressed the Parliament with the following declaration: „I have strived to turn teachers and priests into a force to fight against all forms of ignorance and decline of the peasants" (*Ibidem*). I. D. Lăudat (1976, p. 14) provided the following characterization of the extra-school activity of teachers during Spiru Haret's government:

He wanted to turn the teacher into an apostle serving at raising the economic and cultural level of the peasants. After working in the closed classroom space with the three divisions (the first grade, the second and third grade, and the fourth and fifth grade) the school teacher was supposed to find time to work with adults, to guide readers towards the school's library, supervise the good functioning of the school canteen, organize meetings with the villagers to discuss the foundation of an assembly that would facilitate the provisioning of villages, ameliorating thus social antagonisms. Besides all these duties the teacher was expected to take care of the school garden, where the best species were cultivated. Moreover, the teacher had to go to every house and explain to people how they could plant fruit-trees and vineyard in their gardens. It was also the school teacher who had to organize school assemblies and speak to villagers about the laws of the country and the need to obey them, to teach them about hygiene, in order to avoid the epidemics that killed their children.

Believing that "a country is richer if the public wealth is divided among more people", Haret emphasizes a new dimension of the teachers' social contribution, by organizing courses for adults' literacy and general knowledge and founding teaching training modules along with extra-school units that hosted a large range of activities meant to educate the rural population. A significant component of the extra-school system was the founding of *Houses of Debate and Reading* that preceded the community centers created a few decades later by Dimitrie Gusti. The impact these Houses of Debates and Reading had upon adults' literacy in their first years is reflected by the increased number of libraries recorded in the academic year 1903-1904: over 640 such institutions as compared to the 200 libraries registered in the previous year.

3. The socio-cultural propaganda of the *Academic Extension* led by Virgil Bărbat

Virgil Iuliu Bărbat is considered the founder of the Sociology School of Cluj. In the period between 1924 and 1930 he initiated the activities of the *Academic Extension* Association, with the aim of disseminating academic ideas among adults. The cultural-educational programme of the academic Extension, to which a great number of Romanian intellectuals of the time collaborate, comprises lectures on the most diverse topics (from the conservation of natural resources to demographic aspects, from professional orientation to the history of Romanian journalism, English literature, Mihai Eminescu's work, the beginnings of Romanian literature, Romanian contributions to the universal culture, and so on). Conceived as a non-political cultural movement, following the British-American model, the Academic Extension assumed its declared purpose, namely to disseminate, in an accessible manner, advanced academic ideas among adults. "The cultural propaganda" of the Extension is based on Virgil Bărbat's views according to which education addresses all people, regardless of their age, being a "guide for life", aimed at shaping a Romanian cultural conscience. Virgil Bărbat (1926, p. 42) believes that the university and the Academic Extension are meant "to establish the theoretical relationship between truth and ideal, between daily life and the life of culture".

In 1929, Virgil Bărbat participates in the first *International Congress of Adult Education* held in Cambridge, Great Britain, the first such global meeting aimed at promoting adult education as a discipline in its own right. Upon his return to Romania, Bărbat publishes *The Academic Extension Bulletin*, a publication that promotes international concepts of adult education at the national level.

Besides the activities of the Academic Extension, which had a significant impact upon the dissemination of knowledge among the adult population, Virgil Bărbat's contribution to the development of a conceptual system with a distinctive part in the adult education issue consists in the manner in which he envisaged adult schools in the rural area. Highly significant in this respect is the study *The Expropriation of Culture* (1926), published in the "Academic Extension" Bulletin in Cluj. Considering that it was inappropriate to transpose the contents taught in urban schools to the rural schools "which would actually mean to establish, at the heart of the rural life, a diminishing of the village and agriculture life, which we should enlighten, not weaken" (*Ibidem*, p. 48), Virgil Bărbat launches the idea of founding technical agricultural schools in the rural area "so that the Romanian ploughman could learn about rational agriculture".

Analysing the specific traits of "urban general knowledge schools" and of "rural technical agricultural schools" Bărbat pleads for the foundation of rural schools that would combine the contents offered by the two institutions, "enlighten the peasant with regard to the national and local public life and give him equal rights with the townspeople" (*ibidem*). In this context, "a technical school that would also provide culture" represented the solution proposed by Bărbat for the education of adult population in the rural area.

Virgil Bărbat's intense activity regarding the education of adults as well as the conceptualization of distinct theories in the field of education qualify him as the representative of an ample movement of *adult culturalization and the generalization of scientific knowledge*.

3. "The pedagogy of the nation and the culturalization of adults" in the view of Dimitrie Gusti

Dimitrie Gusti is the advocate of a pedagogy of the nation, of the development of the social personality, his educational initiatives being aimed at framing the individual within the cultural values sphere and enhancing his capacity of creating culture. Dimitrie Gusti is the initiator of a complex project related to the education of the rural population, conducted between 1925 and 1948 and centered around the research-action idea.

In 1938, Gusti elaborates *The Social Service Law*, according to which cultural units had to adopt the activity program of a newly founded institution, The Social Service, and to collaborate with the community centres. Students from various faculties organized in interdisciplinary teams visited villages in order to get documented about the social and educational reality of the respective community. Besides students and teachers, the teams included agronomists, veterinarians and foremen. Besides its investigative dimension, the role of the student teams was to “educate, to prevent unwanted events, to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and of notions of economy, agronomy, hygiene and medicine” (Gusti, 1965, p. 67). Having a pedagogical aim, the activities carried out during the Social Service were aimed at acquiring experience, at getting in touch with the rural realities for both practitioners (doctors, veterinarians, agronomists, economists, teachers), “who had a rather theoretical training, with no connection with the real problems of the country”, and peasants. H. H. Stahl (1981, p. 381), one of Gusti’s students and close collaborators, provided the following characterisation of the institution:

The Social Service was regarded as an instrument of social pedagogy, according to which all the intellectuals graduating from our universities turned into social activists, deeply aware of their duties as citizens of this country and well-informed about the existence of a series of very serious social issues that had to be studied and solved.

The Law of the Social Service that aimed at “identifying the needs of the rural area” (Gusti, 1939, p. 35), provisioned the founding of a community center in each village, in order to consolidate the actions of the social institutions and provide a unitary approach by promoting a culture of health (disease prevention and control), a culture of labour (in order to obtain better crops), a culture of the national mind, soul and education. The law also stipulated the foundation of “monographic committees” aimed at organized the “country knowledge work” by means of monographic researches. As well as this, the law provisioned the organization of two types of schools: schools and courses for the villagers (rural courses organized by the community centers; rural schools organized by the county community centers; superior rural schools with 2 and 3 years programmes) as well as schools and courses for the leaders of the community centers opened at Valea Vinului, Poiana Cămpina and Pietriș, Broșteni-Neamț and Făgăraș.

Dimitrie Gusti’s contributions to the development of adult education in the Romanian area are quite significant. The sociologist establishes the importance of adult education by initiating a social-cultural action programme based on the knowledge and monographic research of social realities, adult education belonging to social work for “the economic, moral, spiritual and sanitary recovery of the peasants”². Moreover, Dimitrie Gusti is the first Romanian to use the concept of *andragogy* meaning “paedagogy of culture, pedagogy of mature youth” (*Idem*, p. 39).

Another significant dimension of the *programme of adult culturalization* was the spreading of books at the countryside. At a conference held on the 14th of May 1935, Gusti stated:

²*Idem*, p. 69.

A good book needs good readers; the work for a book is not done in the offices of the publishing houses or in the printing houses, it is actually done along the country, in people's hearts, in order to create that atmosphere that encourages reading³.

Internal political fights and Romania's involvement in the war led to the cancellation of the Social Service actions. Even if the law was abrogated in the fall of 1939, many community centers remained functional for the following years, to the great advantage of people in the rural area. The principles governing the Social Service set the basis of a new superior rural school, founded by Traian Brăileanu, Stanciu Stoian and Eugen D. Neculau.

4. Conclusions

The legislation on which the reforms of the education system at the beginning of the 20th century were based on guaranteed the unity of the contents imposed for the urban and rural areas, established the obligativity of education and ensured the equality of chances in education. Spiru Haret's contributions to the creation of an institutionalized system that favoured adult education and promoted an educational policy based on the adult population's welfare - a significant dimension of any nation's social and economic progress - mark the beginning of a new stage in adult education, in the Romanian cultural area. Virgil Bărbat's activity in Cluj, along with the approaches of Dimitrie Gusti in Bucharest is part of a vast project for the education of adults in the rural area developed in Romanian throughout the interwar period.

Formal and non-formal dimensions become representative in the field, mainly due to the policies promoted by Spiru Haret and Dimitrie Gusti. The non-formal aspect of teachers' extra-school activities permanently supported by Spiru Haret's legislation, along with the formal, organized, institutionalized character of education promoted by pedagogical seminars, as well as Virgil Bărbat's cultural propaganda aimed at rendering scientific knowledge more accessible for illiterate adults, indicate that Romanian education is influenced by a new tendency, namely to explicitly differentiate between children and adult education.

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³ Detailed in Ovidiu Bădina (1968), *Educația adulților în opera lui Dimitrie Gusti [Adult Education in the Works of Dimitri Gusti]*, în „Educația adulților. Cercetare științifică și acțiune culturală”, București, decembrie 1968.

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